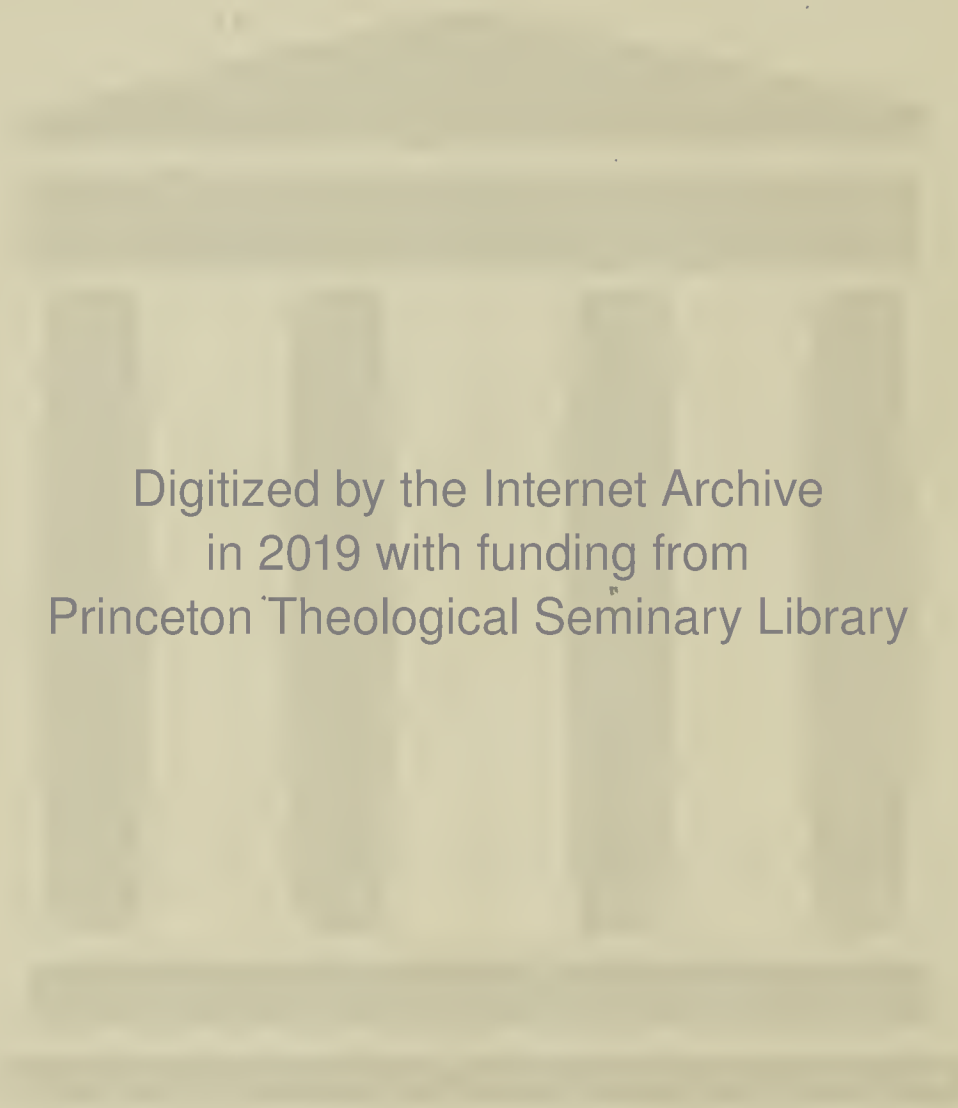
THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF GOD

W. F. ADENEY



CHRISTIAN FAITH AND DOCTRINE SERIES

EDITED BY REV. F. B. MEYER, B.A.

The Inspiration and Authority of Holy Scripture. By REV. J. MONRO GIBSON, M.A., LL.D.

The Doctrine of the Last Things. By REV. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

Conversion; or, The New Birth. By DR. NEWTON H. MARSHALL, M.A.

The Christian Conception of God. By PRINCIPAL W. F. ADENEY, M.A., D.D.

IN PREPARATION.

The Person of Christ. By REV. R. F. HORTON, M.A., D.D.

The Personality and Work of the Holy Spirit. By REV. CHARLES BROWN.

Man and Sin. By PROF. PEAKE, M.A., D.D.

The Resurrection and the Life. By REV. G. HANSON, M.A., D.D.

Missions (Home and Foreign) and the Church. By DR. CHAS. WENYON.

The Church and the Kingdom. By REV. J. SCOTT LIDGETT, M.A.

LONDON: NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCHES.
THOMAS LAW, MEMORIAL HALL, E.C.

Christian Faith and
Doctrine Series

IV

THE
CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF GOD

THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF GOD

BY

WALTER F. ADENEY, M.A., D.D.

PRINCIPAL OF LANCASHIRE COLLEGE, MANCHESTER

AUTHOR OF

"HOW TO READ THE BIBLE," "THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCTRINE OF CHRIST," "HISTORY OF THE GREEK AND EASTERN CHURCHES," THE SECOND PART OF "BIBLICAL INTRODUCTION," ETC.

LONDON: NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCHES. THOMAS LAW, MEMORIAL HALL, E.C.

1909

PRINTED BY
WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED
LONDON AND BECCLES

CONTENTS

NOTE.—It should be understood that the National Free Church Council assumes no responsibility for the views set forth in the volumes of this series, and that such responsibility rests solely upon each author.

CHAPTER I

Christ the Source

I

THE question of supreme importance for all of us is not "Is there a God?" but "What is God?" You may demonstrate to me the necessity of what you are pleased to call "a First Cause" and leave me cold and untouched. The religion of archæology is no more vitalizing than the archæology of religion. You may go further, and prove the existence of an infinite and eternal Being, and still I am unmoved if I am left to think of Him in the Epicurean way as outside the circle of my own experience. But immediately you speak of One in whom I live and move and have my being, it becomes supremely important for me to know what His nature and character are. Is He wholly concerned with His own objects in connection with which all the world is as dust in

the balance? Is He stern, harsh, vindictive, pitiless? May I even be driven to agree with Caliban, brooding in low thought over his aches and smarts, when he exclaims that Setebos, his earth-god, made the world "in spite"? But if so, can I think of a Supreme whom the semi-human monster knew as "the Silence," in whom dwell justice and mercy? Or is the one God of heaven and earth indeed the good and gracious Father of this family of mankind? Have I ground for believing in the character of God as the ideal of perfection—holy, just, merciful? It is only by the answer to these questions that "the burden of the mystery,"

> "The heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world"

can be lightened.

II

The best-known sentence in the Bible, a sentence with which almost every English child is familiar, nearly the shortest sentence and the simplest and easiest to be understood in the immediate sense of its three words, is the sentence "God is love." At the

same time it is the greatest sentence in all literature, the most important statement that has ever been uttered or written. When we consider the range of it, its penetrating significance, its immense scope, its far-reaching consequences, this means more to us than anything else that ever has been said or could be said. If we can accept it as true, and can be assured that above and beneath and around all the toil and tears and terror of this strange struggle for existence that we call life, brighter and better than all the gladness and glory to which it sometimes rises, there is the all-embracing circle of Divine love pressing in upon us to assuage the pain and heighten the joy, to rescue the failure and crown the victory, we can face the world's chances and changes with more than courage, with hope and assurance. Then little Pippa's song has deeper meaning than a child's joy on a sunny holiday. Or if it is beyond our faith as yet to cry—

> "God's in His Heaven,
> All's right with the world,"

at least we can rest assured that all things must be working together for good for those who love God and hear His call.

III

But now the question starts up, is this true? Can we know it to be true? And if so, how? We find the wonderful sentence, this brightest jewel of all the Bible treasury, in the First Epistle of St. John. It is said that the Apostle was a mystic. That title is commonly understood to point to a person who turns the attention of his mind inwards, and by brooding on his own experiences comes to see the light of truth, to hear the voice of God. This, however, is not St. John's own account of the source of his knowledge. He is careful to preface his Epistle with an elaborate statement of the authority on which what he is about to say is based. These are his opening words: "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto

us); that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also," etc.*

According to his own style of emphasis, which is to strike the nail on the head over and over again until he has effectually driven it home, the Apostle insists on the fact that he obtained the knowledge of what he teaches from close personal intercourse with Jesus Christ. He has heard the very words that dropped from his Master's lips, watched His movements, come into contact with Him; and out of this experience of hearing, sight, and touch, he is able to gather the truths that he now sets forth. There is no mysticism in this; it is a reiterated, emphatic appeal to personal experience.

In his Gospel St. John is presented to us as the disciple whom "Jesus loved," and who reclined "in Jesus' bosom." We must banish from our minds the effeminate picture that conventional art has associated with these phrases. In the East every person who reclined at table in the usual way, leaning on his left elbow, while he helped himself to the provisions with his right hand, might be said to be in the bosom of the person at whose right hand he sat. So it is said

* 1 John i. 1–3.

of our Lord that He is "in the bosom" of the Father, and also that He is seated "at the right hand" of the Majesty on high. The two expressions mean the same thing. John was seated at the right hand of Jesus, and so in the bosom of Jesus, as Jesus is at the right hand of God, in the bosom of the Father. In other words, John was Christ's most intimate friend. He could feel the sigh that scarcely broke from his Master's lips. And he had the closer intimacy of intelligent sympathy. He could look deepest into the heart of Jesus. He came nearest to the secret of Jesus. Now, it was this close, intimate knowledge of his Lord that gave him assurance of the truth he declared in his preaching and in his writing.

With this conception of the source of the Apostle's knowledge in our minds, we turn to his Gospel, and there see how he makes use of it. In the opening paragraph we read, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the Only Begotten, from the Father) full of grace and truth."* The "grace" of which he here writes is love manifested in deeds of helpfulness. Thus

* John i. 14.

John saw this active going forth of practical love in his contemplation of the incarnate Christ. At the same time he saw the vision of God in Christ, for he adds, a few lines further on, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." * John reclines in the bosom of Jesus; Jesus is in the bosom of the Father. What the Son knows by His intimacy with His Father, John learns—in his degree and measure, as far as he can receive the great revelation—by his intimacy with Christ. The same idea comes out again later in the Gospel. During the conversation in the upper room Philip exclaims, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Surprised and distressed at the request, Jesus replies, "Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know Me, Philip? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." † This, then, is the source of St. John's knowledge of God. He saw God in Christ, and what he saw of God in Christ was love incarnate.

* John i. 18. † John xiv. 8, 9.

IV

Now, leaving the Apostolic exposition of this situation, let us endeavour to estimate it on its own merits. I would put the case thus: We cannot have a greater or clearer idea of God than the character of Jesus. The supreme greatness of God is not His infinity, His almighty power, His perfect knowledge, His unfailing wisdom. Moral attributes are greater than physical energies, and even greater than intellectual capacities. The crowning glory of God is His character. Next, it is not too much to assert that we can have no higher conception of the character of God than the character of Jesus. That is the highest idea of goodness that we can conceive. We may put the case another way. We cannot think that God is inferior to Jesus. It is not possible to suppose that the infinite and eternal Father is not so good as His Son whom we see walking on earth in a humble, human guise. Viewing the matter more externally, and with less demand on Christian faith, I may state it thus: We cannot suppose that the mysterious, hidden source of all life and being is less good than

the best of that to which He has given birth. Christ is that best as far as our knowledge extends. I urge, then, that it is reasonable to think of God as possessing the very real goodness which we see manifested in the life and doings of Jesus Christ.

Let us look at this more exactly. Next to John, Peter was our Lord's most intimate companion, and this is how Peter sums up the story of his Master's career. He says that Jesus "went about doing good." * But a life that could be so described in the briefest and at the same time the most exact summary of its course is just what St. John saw it to be—a life of incarnate love. This, too, is the impression we may gather for ourselves when we read the gospel story. Jesus never lived or worked for His own pleasure or convenience. From first to last He entirely renounced self. His whole life was expended in deeds of service for mankind. Not on the cross alone, but throughout His ministry He simply gave Himself, expending His life, as a whole-hearted sacrifice on behalf of His brother men. He most truly summed up this unqualified characteristic of His life when he said, "The

* Acts x. 38.

Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." * But in all this, as we have seen, Jesus is revealing to us the nature and character of God. If this is what Jesus was, it must be what God is. If we get our clearest vision of God when we gaze into the heart of Jesus, and this is what the heart of Jesus contains, then this must be the nature of God. Since Jesus is seen to be love incarnate, God must be love itself. From no mystical intuition, then, but by that personal knowledge of Christ which to John was more intimate than in anybody else's experience, but which we too may share in a measure just in proportion as we can trace out the life and character of Jesus in the gospel story and see it interpreted by His work in the world, John could say "God is love," and we can echo the saying with glad assurance of its truth.

As I pointed out in starting, this is the greatest of all truths. It is the fundamental assurance for faith. For faith is needed to hold it in spite of all that seems to oppose it, when as Tennyson says—

> "Nature red in tooth and claw with ravin
> Shrieks against our creed."

---

* Mark x. 45.

Storms that strew the coast with wrecks, and earthquakes that fling whole cities into ruin may start strange doubts as to the goodness of Creation and Providence. But in spite of difficulties that cannot yet be explained, when we turn to the vision of God in Christ we see that above the darkness, the terror, the agony, is a love that will conquer in the end and bring the sweet out of the bitter, extracting honey from the very lion's mouth.

Many practical conclusions may be drawn from this great truth of God's love. Supreme above all is the obligation to meet love with love, to love God with all our hearts, and to love our neighbours as ourselves, for as St. John says, "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen."

V

So far our consideration of this greatest of all subjects is very simple and elementary. A child can understand it. Thus, as our Lord said, the greatest truth is revealed to babes and sucklings. The more childlike a soul becomes, the better can that soul appreciate it. Therefore Jesus declares that any one who

would enter the kingdom of God, and so appreciate this great truth, must first become as a little child.

Nevertheless, Wordsworth reminds us that "obstinate questionings" come even to childhood. The childlike appreciation of God in Christ is not intended to arrest mental activity and send us back to infantile thinking. This is a spiritual attitude, not an intellectual. But the intellectual must follow. The thinking man who sees the character of God in Christ is still confronted with the eternal inquiries concerning the very essence of being. How does this stand related to the righteousness of God? How does it relate itself to His infinity? and how does the infinity of God affect our conception of His personality? Again, are we to think of God revealed in Christ as immanent in Him alone and external to us, or, as Athanasius taught, is His immanence in us the presupposed condition of His incarnation in Jesus? How are we to conceive of the Incarnation itself? Lastly, what is the Trinity? These and allied questions press upon us, and no simple answers to them are possible.

These tremendous subjects cannot engage

our attention as yet, while on the threshold of our inquiry we have to see that primarily and essentially the Christian conception of God is that which we derive from Christ. We shall not get it, however, merely by analyzing the reported sayings of Jesus. No great teacher can be limited to the words that drop from his lips. In the case of any leader of thought the personality counts for more than the mere utterances. The genuine artist sees visions of beauty that he despairs of putting on canvas in paint from his brush; the true poet dreams glories of imagination that he can never express in verse; the gifted composer hears ideal music, celestial chimes, angels' harps, that no written score can represent and no human orchestra can perform. What St. Paul calls "the truth as it is *in* Jesus" must be vaster and grander and richer than the words even of One of whom it could be said that "He spake as never man spake." Moreover, in expressing the truth that lived in the depth of His consciousness our Lord was not limited to vocal utterances. John the Baptist in his humility could retire behind his message and speak of himself as simply a voice. But nobody else would describe the

rough prophet of the wilderness as *vox et praeterea nihil.* Here was a potent personality, drawing all sorts and conditions of men from far off cities to his remote retreat, and impressing his message on them by his fiery presence. The preacher who is nothing out of the pulpit comes in the end to be regarded as little more than a rhetorician—perhaps as a mere wind-bag. Even for his words to tell with force the speaker must persuade men by his life and character.

If this is true of purely human teachers, much more so is it the case with Jesus Christ. The anger that flashed from His eyes and rang through His voice at sight of hypocrisy or cruelty, the sympathy that beamed in His smile and thrilled through His gentler words in presence of helpless need, the whole expression of His personality combined to give meaning and effect to His teaching. He lived His truth and He taught it by His life. In all this He is the greatest of teachers.

But we must go much further. Our Lord is not only the Founder of the Faith; He is its centre, and that because of what He was and did and suffered. His declaration that He was sent on His mission by God,

is only another way of saying that He came into the world as an expression of the mind and will of God. If, as St. Paul and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews say, His submission to death was His supreme act of obedience to His Father, the Divine will that He thus executed must answer to corresponding characteristics of God out of which it springs. And if in His resurrection He was raised from the dead by God —as it is almost invariably described in the New Testament—it follows that this too is a manifestation of the will of God, and therefore of the nature of God out of which His will issues. Thus the life, death, and resurrection of Christ are all stages in His revelation of God.

VI

But it will be objected that these statements take for granted certain highly controversial theological positions. They are based on the belief that Christ has come to us from God and has done the will of God and borne the will of God as here described. For the fully satisfied Christian this is so. But for the inquiring mind it is not at all

enough to lay down such propositions, because the grounds on which they rest need first to be substantiated. I might point out that Christian history and experience confirm the statements of Christ's early disciples. The proof of redemption is that Christ redeems. The work of Christ through the ages justifies His mission; and then the vindication of His mission flings light back into the mystery of its origin. Because He redeems it becomes apparent that there must be a source of redemption from which as Redeemer He sprang. In this way the work of the Son reveals the nature of the Father. But leaving these great questions aside for the present, what I want to make apparent at the commencement is that the conception of God which is essential Christian is that which dawns upon us with ever increasing brightness and fulness while we study the life and teaching and character of Jesus Christ. If people even in Christian Churches have hard, or low, or narrow, or meagre, or in any other way false notions of God, it is because they have forgotten to look for Him in Christ and have been content to set up for worship a creation of their own imagination,

metaphysics, or logic—in other words, an idol, a divinity turned out by a human factory. Whether the world chooses to accept it or not, the fact remains that the genuinely Christian conception of God is the Christ conception, not merely Christ's own conception of God, or that which He gives us in His express teaching on the subject, but the conception that we form from our contemplation of Him. If this conception is not accepted, it is none the less the Christian conception. The rejection of it is the rejection of Christianity, not the denial that it is Christian.

I labour at this point because it is fundamental to all that follows. Here is our touchstone, our standard of measurement, our rule of judgment for all speculations on the nature of God so long as we keep within the circle of Christian ideas. Simple as this position is, and obvious as it should be, and tautological as what I am saying about it must appear, the neglect of it and departure from it have led to helpless flounderings in speculation. It is true that the principle here laid down may seem at the outset to limit the theistic quest. Why, it may be asked, should we bind our thoughts

to an idea derived in this particular way? But that is only asking, why should we accept the Christian faith—a question of evidences and the grounds of belief with which I am not immediately concerned. One thing at a time. Now before we can say whether we will accept or reject the Christian faith it is absolutely necessary that we should know what that faith is. But the central idea of any religious system is its conception of God. Therefore, even for the preliminary purpose of knowing what Christianity is, this conception must be examined within its essential limitations.

We cannot be content, however, to confine our study to this purely abstract region. The absolute value of the Christian idea, as well as its nature and form, must come into consideration if we are to obtain all the advantage we should desire from such a study. For the same reason the worth of Christ's revelation of God and the wisdom of seeking our knowledge of God in Him need to be considered and the claims of this method justified.

CHAPTER II

Other Sources

I

IN directing attention especially to that conception of God which we derive from our Lord Jesus Christ I am far from implying that we have no other means of knowing God, or that the knowledge of Him that we receive from other sources is valueless and negligible. This is the conclusion to which the rigour of Ritschlianism would seem to lead its disciples. The eighteenth-century apologists had made the mistake of drawing a sharp line of demarcation between "natural" and "revealed religion." At the same time they had made the very most of the former as the firm foundation on which the subsequent revelation was based. With these men God was essentially the deity of natural religion, as known to us by nature and reason. Christianity came in simply

to add, as crowning glories, the more elevated moral characteristics and the more gracious evangelical elements together with the great specific revelation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Schleiermacher opened the way for more vital spiritual thinking by going back to the God-consciousness in our sense of dependence as the root of religion and our specific consciousness of relationship with Christ as the source of the more definite Christian knowledge, associating this with the historic Jesus, especially as He is seen in the Fourth Gospel. But Ritschl went much further in the reaction against eighteenth-century methods. Seeing that our latest and fullest knowledge of God is derived from Christ, he discarded not only the method of natural theology, but also the use of the Old Testament in this connection. Such a drastic measure does not imply an absolute denial of natural religion or of truth in Judaism. We may illustrate it by the publication of a new text-book in an advancing science, which so far supersedes its predecessors that they are immediately rendered useless, and in some cases seen to be positively misleading. The medical student does not begin his reading with the old text-books of a preceding

generation. He would only have to unlearn what he got from them if he wasted his time in this way. Similarly, the thorough-going Ritschlian, holding that Christ represents the value of God for us, discards any lower revelation. He allows its use for the student of history who is curious to trace out the evolution of thought; but he cannot permit it to intrude on the province of practical religion. There the historic Jesus, as known to us in the Gospels and as approached through His work of redemption in the Christian society, is the only source of any knowledge of God that is of real value to us.

II

Ritschlianism may be regarded as the latest edition of the Marcionite doctrine. A modern system developed by enlightened scholarship, it escapes the crudity and extravagance of the ancient heresy propounded by the reformer whom the fierce Tertullian called "the Pontic Wolf." Marcion endeavoured to revive the Pauline doctrine of grace which had been strangely ignored in the sub-Apostolic age, and he resisted the

prevalent Judaizing of Christianity. Eager to restore the teaching of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, he exaggerated the peculiarities of Paulinism, his version of which was little better than a caricature. In common with many of the gnostics, with whom he has been unfairly classed and therefore anathematized, Marcion repudiated the Creator of the physical universe and God of the Old Testament. Creation was evil. Jehovah was sternly just, angrily vindictive, without pity. Christ came direct from heaven to reveal the God of love, and so to bring the grace of forgiveness. According to Marcion, therefore, the Christian God was totally unknown before Christ appeared. The Jews worshipped another God, with whom Christians have nothing to do. There was a truth behind this extravagance which the Catholic Church of the time did not perceive. The common way of the orthodox theologians was to set the Old Testament and the New Testament on a level as one absolute revelation of God, twin volumes of the same work. The result was twofold. First, Christian ideas were read into the Jewish Scriptures. That was not so mischievous as the second consequence, namely,

that Jewish notions narrowed the freedom, hardened the tone, and lowered the spirituality of the Church's life. The same thing was seen in another form in England and Scotland during the seventeenth century. With all that was noble in Puritanism, an element of hardness, and sometimes even of ferocity, was found to be blending with its truly evangelic fervour, owing to its unquestioning absorption of Old Testament notions. Ritschlianism saves its disciples from this mistake.

More recently the rise and development of the historical method has shed a new light on all these questions. We see now that we need neither repudiate the Old Testament, nor canonize it as of the same rank with the New Testament in the scale of revelation. It is of immense value as showing us the early teachings of the religion out of which ultimately Christianity blossomed, and also as preserving permanent elements in those teachings.

III

But while directing attention to the specially Christian conception of God, I am far from denying either truth or worth in

other and earlier conceptions. The study of comparative religion has brought to light important facts which are not only worthy of note on their own account, but which also help us in the understanding of Christian truth. Apart from that great subject there are sources of knowledge of God, each of which is of distinctive significance. In the main these may be classified as of three types—the speculative, the Jewish, and the mystical or experimental.

1. The Speculative Source.

Christian faith does not demand the repudiation of all knowledge of God outside Christianity. It does not require us to paint all the non-Christian portions of the map black in order to show up the whiteness of Christendom by contrast. It can recognize truth wherever it sees it, and claim it for Christ when in harmony with His truth. The idea of the *Logos Spermaticos*, the Divine Word and Reason scattered through all races of mankind, which Justin Martyr based on a Stoic doctrine, is far more honouring to God as well as much more liberal in spirit. According to this idea, all true thinking, all right feeling, all good

conduct anywhere in the world, Pagan as well as Christian, may be reckoned as springing from seeds of the Divine *Logos*, scattered over the world. Gleams of light and hints of truth flash out in most unexpected quarters from the literature and religion of mankind generally.

Accordingly, in whichever way we may conduct the great quest—whether along Anselm's high *à priori* road of the ontological argument that would find the necessity of the being of God in the very idea of God, or by means of the cosmological argument which demands a first cause for the existence of the universe, or in the argument from design which concludes from the mutually serviceable arrangements of the several parts of Nature that they must have been fitted together with purpose to effect certain ends, or from a position more acceptable in the present day, according to which the intelligibility of the universe points to a Supreme Intelligence of which it is the expression,—whatever method may be followed, and whatever avenue of investigation explored, if the existence of God is believed to be established, there is a ground of knowledge of God anterior to and independent of

Christianity. We must attach some meaning to the word "God," and therefore have some idea of Him when we are led by our speculations to the theistic position. A bald assertion of existence would be without point and issue. It could lead us nowhere. If we have any means of knowing that there is a God in the evidences of Nature or by means of the powers of the human mind, there must be corresponding natural and human means of knowing something about Him.

When we have come to the conclusion that God is in some degree known by any such processes of thought, we have to ask, how does this knowledge stand related to the Christian truth about God? If God is one, and the growing perception of the unity of the universe makes this now more certain than ever it was, there must be a harmony between the results of the two sources of knowledge. Moreover, there is no reason why we should keep them apart in the old way of separating natural theology from Christianity. All the writers of the New Testament follow Jesus Christ in taking the existence of God for granted. This was admitted by the people for whom they wrote.

But in assuming it, they assumed its essential contents. They did not juggle with words. In using the name "God" they accepted the central idea attached to it. They elevated, purified, enlightened, spiritualized—in a word, they Christianized it. Still, the root idea must have been there and must have been used by them, and this they retained. As Jews, writing to men who were more or less acquainted with the Old Testament, they carried over much of the Jewish conception of God. This is a subject to be considered a little later. But over and above that they held a fundamental theistic position. Now, it is this fundamental theistic position that is conceived in the speculative region by people who believe they find God in Nature and in thought. Here we have those conceptions of might and wisdom that the vastness of the universe and the intricate organization of it suggest. In his critique of the Pure Reason Kant showed that the arguments from causation and design could not prove the infinity of God, since the cosmos, as far as we know it, is limited, and the very idea of contrivances implies limiting conditions. But at all events they show us such immeasurable greatness that the mind of

man is awed before it as before what to all intents and purposes is infinite. If the metaphysical arguments are allowed, it is they that seek to demonstrate the infinite and the absolute. Now, whatever is given in these directions remains valid after the Christian revelation has been received. If it is true it cannot be neutralized by that revelation, neither can it be superseded by that revelation. These are not the phases of Divinity manifested in the Incarnation. Yet they are implied in the Christian idea of God. That He is the Infinite One inhabiting eternity cannot be seen from the manifestation of perfect goodness in our Lord's life on earth. Yet the Incarnation would not be what it is to us unless He were that. Thus the basal theism comes into the Christian conception of God and is presupposed by it.

A more difficult question arises when we consider the ethical character of the idea of God. The Manicheans and many of the gnostics could see nothing but evil, or at best failure, in Nature. That has never been the prevailing view of the Church. That Nature on the whole is both beautiful and beneficent is perhaps a conclusion drawn

from the application of the Christian idea of God to its phenomena rather than from a cold study of them. Still, although earthquakes shatter towns and tempests strew the coast with wrecks, for one Messina that is destroyed thousands of cities are spared, and for one *Royal George* that founders there are whole navies that sail the seas in safety. While John Stuart Mill was driven to doubt the almightiness he was persuaded of the goodness of the Creator. If our annual harvest thanksgiving services are honest they imply a perception that the fruitful fields bear witness to a bountiful Giver. Jesus is making no new revelation when He calls our attention to the indiscriminate generosity of our Father in heaven, who "maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." * This, then, is not a specifically Christian revelation. It is a lesson of Nature to which our Lord resorts in order to point a moral.

On the other hand, we are confronted with grievous perplexities when attempting to appreciate the goodness of God in Nature. To say that the balance is overwhelming on the side of beneficence does not satisfy us in

* Matt. v. 45.

face of a single case of apparently needless or undeserved suffering. It is nothing to tell me that a hundred lambs are sporting in the spring sunshine and a score of merry boys and girls are at play in the street, while my innocent child lies dying in the agony of meningitis.

There is, however, another aspect of the revelation of God in Nature that has grown in value immensely as the result of studies in science. We are persuaded of the rigour of law as this was never perceived until recent times. Sometimes it is illustrated in a grim form of justice, outraged law avenging itself on the offender with relentless severity. On the whole, it must be admitted that Matthew Arnold was right in discerning a power not ourselves, a stream of tendencies in the universe, making for righteousness. On the whole, vice and cowardice tend to ruin, and virtue and courage to well-being. Even when these moral results are not seen to be ground out of Nature's rough mill, there is one grand principle now visible with an unquestionable certainty never realized in earlier ages. To those who believe that God is in Nature the uniformity of law is an expression of the constancy of God. Hebrew

psalmists delighted to laud the faithfulness of Jehovah. Natural law is an abiding witness to God's faithfulness. It is impossible to think of God as He is revealed in the universe being either fickle or capricious. Hooker's sublime conception of law obeyed by all God's creatures from the angels downwards, is illustrated a thousand times more clearly to-day than was the case three hundred years ago when the "Ecclesiastical Polity" first saw the light.

2. The Old Testament Revelation.

This comes nearer home to the specific contents of the Christian idea of God. Jesus was a Jew of Palestine living among Jews who were familiar with their own Scriptures. Much of the teaching of the Old Testament was contained implicity in His teaching; some parts of it He expressly accentuated, especially the two commandments that He selected as the first and the second. Even when He repudiated other parts—such as the *lex talionis*, the divorce law, and the regulations concerning oaths—it was not to contradict the root principles of the older religion, but rather to develop those principles, as He said, not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it.

Therefore we cannot appreciate the Christian conception of God if we fail to take note of what is common to it and the Jewish conception on which it rests and of which it is a development, even while it eclipses and supersedes its predecessor. A wise teacher gives his attention chiefly to what is new to his disciples, or perhaps if familiar, neglected by them. For this reason we cannot do justice to him by taking his explicit utterances as giving us his complete system. Even the creeds are not summaries of full-orbed theology. They are bulwarks against certain threatened attacks on the citadel of truth. Where there is no danger they throw up no ramparts. Like our island forts, all their guns are pointed towards the sea by which the invader may approach. Therefore there may be truths in Christ's full conception of God that were not brought into the forefront of the gospel teaching, because they were not in dispute or in any way questioned among His hearers. For our present purpose, however, which is not merely to expound certain specific teachings of Christ, but more especially to come to understand the Christian conception of God as far as possible in its completeness, these truths

must be recovered and recognized. This procedure applies to the knowledge of God in Nature and speculation. Still more is it applicable to the Jewish ideas of God which Jesus shared with His fellow-countrymen.

What, then, is the specific Jewish conception of God that is tacitly accepted by our Lord so as to become a constituent element of the Christian conception? Plainly Jehovah is thought of as personal. In early Hebrew thought the notion is very anthropomorphic, although when we read of God's eyes, His arms, His hands, we should make some allowance for Oriental imagery and the poetic imagination. A more serious limitation is found in the ascription to the God of Israel of human passions—jealousy, rage, etc. Everything unworthy of the highest and best in this Hebrew picture of Jehovah is dropped out in the Christian conception. But the personality is retained. This, however, cannot be regarded as in any way especially Jewish or even Semitic. All primitive peoples not only conceive of their gods as personal, but personify much that is material and dead; and among civilized people it is only in the metaphysical abstractions of philosophers that the personality of

God is lost. Therefore it is not here that we shall find the peculiar Jewish contribution to the idea of God.

In the Old Testament much is made of the majesty of God. Thus a psalmist exclaims—

"The Lord reigneth; he is apparelled with majesty;
The Lord is apparelled, he hath girded himself with strength:
The world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved.
Thy throne is established of old:
Thou art from everlasting." *

Associated with this thought of God's kingship is the idea of the kingdom of God which passes over from the Old Testament, through later writings such as the *Psalms of Solomon* and the Jewish Apocalypses, and is adopted first by John the Baptist and then by Jesus Christ. But while it is Jewish, the thought of God as King is by no means limited to Israel. It is an essentially Oriental conception. The Jew came to have a much more exalted notion of the throne of God than any of his neighbours. But it was not the thought of majesty as such, merely magnified and lifted to supreme regions, that marked off the throne of Jehovah.

Certainly it is not in the personality of

* Psa. xciii. 1, 2.

God, nor is it in the majesty of God, that the Hebrew peculiarity is to be found. This is to be seen in the idea of the holiness of God. Jehovah is a holy God; that is the crown and topmost pinnacle of the Hebrew faith. The idea of holiness has been traced back to the simple thought of aloofness and reserve. This may be brought into connection with the thought of the Divine majesty. God is high and lifted up. A more primitive idea is simply that of a dangerous, unapproachable seclusion, a fatal separateness, like the savage taboo. It is perilous to approach Mount Sinai when Jehovah comes down upon it in the thundercloud. Uzzah is smitten dead for touching the ark even when his motive is to save it from falling. According to Schürer, when God is described as the "Holy One of Israel," this means that He is "the unapproachable, incomparable One," and God is said to hallow Himself when He "preserves and reveals the incomparable majesty of His being." * Schürer points out that in the law sin is regarded as an offence against God's holiness, and that as such it needs cleansing by blood.† But

* "Old Testament Theology," vol. ii. p. 171.

† *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 171.

Professor Peake defines the notion of God's holiness in the Old Testament as "His character taken in its completeness."* Again, he says of the term "holiness," "this, as applied to God, means His separation from all the weakness and imperfections of His creatures, and thus stands for His Divinity in contrast to humanity." †

In the fully blossomed faith presented to us by the prophets, holiness gradually acquires moral and spiritual qualities. Thus, when Isaiah in his Temple vision sees Jehovah surrounded by the seraphs, who veil their faces before His dazzling glory, he is seized with a sudden sense of shame at his own sin, and exclaims, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." ‡ No doubt we

* "The Religion of Israel," p. 73.

† *Ibid.*, p. 158. Professor Bennett in "The Theology of the Old Testament," p. 87, and Principal Skinner in the Cambridge Bible, "Ezekiel," treat it as simply meaning sacred and divine. Things and persons are holy when they are sacred, devoted to God. Krautsch similarly explains the idea of the holiness of God in the Hebrew religion. See Hastings' "Dictionary of the Bible," Supplementary Volume, article, "Religion of Israel."

‡ Isa. vi. 5.

have here elements of the old idea of the terror of majesty; but the prophet's shrinking shame points to more than that.

For our present purpose, however, it is not necessary to determine the exact content of the ancient Hebrew conception of holiness. Quite apart from this the Old Testament reveals to us the idea of God as righteous, faithful, merciful, and in every way good. It also brings before us the picture of God's righteous government of the world; He is indignant at the sight of sin—that is to say, moral evil, especially impurity, injustice, and cruelty, regarded as an offence in His sight. These evil things He punishes both in His own people, as Amos and Hosea and the prophets generally teach, and also in the Gentile world, as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah and the prophets' "burdens" against Tyre, Babylon, and other foreign cities. The twofold picture of God's character as expressed in His own action and in His treatment of the conduct of mankind helps to make up the idea of the holiness of God as this was conceived in New Testament times.

This is the unique distinction of the religion of Israel. It is not too much to say

that this is our grand proof of its divine inspiration. It is not merely its monotheism—superb as that conception of God is in comparison with polytheistic Paganism—that marks off the Jewish faith in its finest development from neighbouring cults, nor its spirituality in contrast to prevalent idolatry, but more than either of these sublime features, its moral character. In Paganism religion is too often quite separate from ethics. The Pagan cults are not so much immoral as non-moral. It scarcely occurred to their priests and philosophers to suppose that there was any connection between purity of character and religious worship. But it was the great work of the Hebrew prophets to bring out that connection and insist on its central, vital, all-essential character. The God of Israel is a righteous God who cannot endure iniquity. If His holiness is His separateness, still it is fundamentally His separateness from sin.

All this was recognized by the Jews of Christ's day. Their ideas of righteousness were narrow, formal, external; their notions of purity were external too, and ceremonial. In these degenerate traits of Pharisaism we see the decay of the grand old faith. Jesus

exposed the narrowness and the shallowness of such conceptions. He went back to the ideas of the great prophets, and then beyond them in His religion of inward motive. Thus He enlarged and deepened and spiritualized the idea of holiness. But, while so doing, He made the very most of the old idea that Jehovah is a holy God. The first petition of His model prayer is for the hallowing of God's name. His prohibition of swearing is for the more effectual keeping of the third commandment.

When we consider the Old Testament thought of God in detail, we see in it much anticipation of the Christian idea. Not only is He righteous and truthful; He is also most merciful and compassionate, and psalmists delight to sing over and over again how "the mercy of the Lord endureth for ever."

The exaggerated idea of the transcendence of God, which will engage our attention subsequently, belongs only to later Judaism. Meanwhile the thought of God's supremacy as Lord over all is accepted by Jesus Christ, and honoured in the New Testament. Whatever phase of divine immanence may be consistent with Christianity, it cannot supersede

the sovereignty of God as a will above human wills—not merely *in* human wills. This truth is accentuated with all possible emphasis in the idea of the kingdom of God, which is the starting-point, and, at first, the central theme of our Lord's teaching. That idea, interpreted by Aramaic usage, means not the realm but the rule of God; it indicates the exercise of His sovereignty. It was an Old Testament idea, developed in later Judaism, accepted by John the Baptist, adopted, enlarged, spiritualized by Christ, but never so as to empty it of its essential meaning. With Jesus, as with Isaiah, God is King over all. Therefore the great requisite in the rectification of a world out of joint is that His will shall be done on earth as it is done in heaven. This is the perfection of the Old Testament religion, or, as Jesus puts it, the fulfilment of the law and the prophets.

3. Mysticism.

This is sometimes urged upon us as the only source of the knowledge of God worth seeking. Here we have immediate vision, self-verifying conviction. The mystic knows God by contact of spirit with spirit,

beholds the inner light, hears the still small voice speaking clearly to him in the silence of his soul. Enjoying such an experience, what need has he of an objective revelation, whether in Nature, in prophecy—which is only the publication of other people's mystic visions, or even in the objective Christ of the gospel narratives? He has the Christ within him. All else is secondhand knowledge, mediate, external, little more than verbal.

We must distinguish between the mystic and the intuitionist philosopher. They agree in believing in the immediateness of knowledge, but they differ radically in their methods of acquiring it. The mystic repudiates ratiocination, denies the power of intellectuality, which with the philosopher is the royal road to knowledge. He is above metaphysics. The white light of truth is not his ideal; or if he has any conception of it, this must be the light of white heat. Roughly characterized, the followers of mysticism fall into two classes, which we may call respectively the Oriental and the Western. The Eastern mystic is a quietist, and his type has been reproduced by the quietist of the West. The Hindoo fakir sitting on the ground

motionless night and day, and the Monk of Mount Athos dreaming in his cell till the holy light dawns within him, both hope to come into the realization of God by passive waiting and self-emptying. Genuine Western mysticism, as seen in Tauler and the author of the "German Theology," is of a very different character. Even in its most quietist form this mysticism teaches that the knowledge of God is to be obtained by love rather than by reason—by love, not by meditation, as in the East. But with some, especially with Tauler, it comes in response to obedience. This is the very opposite to the fakir's passivity. The love prized mystically must flow out in deeds of fruitful service, and then the light will dawn within, and the truth will be known. Such mysticism does not find its source in the contemplative life; it springs from the active.

So far, however, we have only the question of method before us, together with the assertion that it is successful, that it attains its end, that it does introduce the soul to the knowledge of God, whether by meditation or by love and obedience, whether by the Oriental passivity or by the Western activity. When, however, we proceed further

and prosecute our inquiries into the contents of this knowledge, we enter on a new stage. The question now is, what can we learn about God in this way? What does the mystic know concerning God that neither the rationalist nor the simple believer can perceive? Such knowledge, we are told, is too deep for words. It cannot be communicated by one to another. It must be received individually in order to be understood at all. This contention would seem to carry the subject off the field of discussion. Mysticism is the most individualistic type of religion. It leaves its devotee to pursue an absolutely lonely quest for truth. In his outward life he may be social; in his essential religion he must be solitary—a soul alone with God.

Still, there are points where this solitary mystic can be met. For instance, if he declares that he is a Christian mystic we may ask him what is the relation between his Christianity and his mysticism? Is his conception of God the same as the Hindoo mystic's conception of Brahm? If it is, then he is a Hindoo at heart, although he has added a faith in Christ to his creed in an entirely different compartment from that

of his relationship to God. He has simply attached his Christianity as a chapel to his Hindoo temple. But the genuinely Christian mystic will not assume this position. He knows the Christian God, the God of Jesus, the Father in heaven. How does he get this knowledge? He says he receives it by the inner light that comes on condition of his love and obedience. But how does he account for the fact that this light introduces him to the heavenly Father whom Jesus knew, and not to a Hindoo Brahm? Surely it must be admitted that the specific Christian form of his conception of God as distinguished from a Hindoo conception results from what he knows of Christianity, and that not by the inner light, but by means of Christian teaching, acquaintance with the New Testament, and knowledge of Christ. But this brings us round to our earlier position. We have to conclude that the Christian mystic, in so far as his perception of God is Christian, is dependent on the external revelation in Christ for that characterization of it.

The subject may be approached from another point of view. If the mystic vision alone were equal to the perception of all

attainable truth about God, we should expect to see it reaching that end among people of various races and religions outside Christendom as well as within its pale. But seeing that to the Christian mystic his knowledge of God is something higher and purer than the knowledge attained by a Hindoo or a Mohammedan, there must be something besides his own native spiritual insight to give it him. It may be said, however, that the new spiritual life derived from Christ enables the Christian mystic to see what is invisible to his brother heathen or Mussulman mystic, that he has had his eyes opened, his vision anointed, his insight purged and quickened to see God with unique clearness and truth. Not only do I allow that to be possible, I hold it to be a great truth. But we must push the inquiry further back. How are the Christian regeneration and cleansing and anointing accomplished? Surely not without some knowledge of God. Then there must be a previous knowledge to prepare for the perception of the mystic knowledge, and for the Christian that previous knowledge is what he knows of God in Christ.

Can we, however, leave the question at

this point? After all, what is this mystic knowledge of God that is felt to be so precious by those who lay claim to it? It is not a perception of theological dogmas; it is not even the recognition of novel truths of any kind; it is like the knowledge a man has of his brother man; it is the experience of personal friendship. The altar is built, the wood is laid; mysticism sets fire to the pile. In the yearning passion of his soul for God the mystic feels the nearness of the divine presence and realizes the love and faithfulness and holiness of God as he never realized them in the cold court of reason. So different is this vital personal appreciation that he now seems to see these truths for the first time. Hitherto he never knew what they were in their height and depth and width of range, their rich celestial hues, their throbbing vital energy. With all this added they become new truths. Yet they could not have been there at all to be thus quickened into life if it had not been for the previous introduction of them by the Christian evangel. They have not sprung up in vacancy; they are flourishing on the soil of earlier teaching, on the ground of an objective knowledge of Christ

in the gospel story and of His work in the Church.

Pushed back, then, to its starting-point the mystic knowledge of God has to rest on the revelation of God in Christ if it is to be a Christian knowledge of God. Mysticism is not a parallel method lying side by side with the historical method of revelation in the person of Christ. Much less does it differ from that historical method by being the only source of our knowledge of God. On the contrary, in so far as it is Christian it follows the historical method, presupposes that method, and rests on it; it comes like the dawn illuminating the landscape that was there before, though but dimly perceived and coldly appreciated.

CHAPTER III

God as the Father of All

I

WHEN I was searching a library for recent representative literature dealing with this subject my eyes fell on Professor Samuel Harris's volume, "God the Creator and Lord of All," which I had hitherto respected as a safe, sound, and sober book, and I observed that, where it was strictly confined to the subject indicated by its title, this was treated almost entirely in two divisions. The first division was devoted to Theism and consisted of a discussion of the well-known arguments for the being of God; the second was occupied with a consideration of the doctrine of the Trinity. The next book I took down from the shelves was Professor Orr's able work, "The Christian View of God and the World." I thought that with such a title I had a right to expect a very specifically

Christian exposition of the idea of God. I found this also dealing with the same two topics—Theism and the Trinity. The body of the work was devoted to the relation of God to the universe. But Lecture VII. seemed to promise more, since it was headed "The Higher Conception of God involved in the Incarnation." That conception I discovered to be "God as Triune," and in reading it I was launched again on a discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity. The third book that I opened was the late Principal Caird's "Gifford Lectures" on "The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity," and there I found the Christian idea of God contrasted both with the Pantheistic view and the Deistic view as that of an Infinite Mind which exists not simply as the external Creator "but as the inward Spirit in and through which all things live and move and have their being." * Dr. Caird proceeds to elaborate the idea that God as thus conceived by us is self-revealing, and then advances to the position that the self-revelation of God makes Him known to us as a Trinity. This conception of the Trinity, however, is not given as an objective truth of external revelation. It is involved in the

* "The Gifford Lectures," 1899, vol. i. p. 144.

idea of God as mind and spirit. Both with Kant and with Hegel the notion of an *à priori* essential Trinitarian view had been developed on metaphysical lines as leading to what they conceived to be the essential ideas of Christianity, although the Kantian Trinity and still more the Hegelian Trinity are far from being echoes of the creeds of orthodox theology.

It would seem, then, that to theologians and philosophers alike the Christian conception of God is first the theistic idea of an Infinite Mind or Spirit, and then, as more distinctively characteristic, the doctrine of the Trinity. With this view, apparently so generally accepted, I turn to our primary source, and ask again, what is the conception of God revealed in Jesus Christ? That He is Mind or Spirit is apparent at once. But this was also evident in Judaism. Only the crude, early Hebrew religion conceived of its divinity as a limited corporeal personality. Again and again in the ripe prophetic utterance Jehovah is described with a glow of enthusiastic eloquence as the almighty and universally ruling Spirit.* This, then, is not a specifically Christian conception of

* See, for instance, Psa. cxxxix., and Isa. xl.

God. The Trinitarian idea is Christian. Even if it is foreshadowed in the Old Testament, the evidence on which it is developed is distinctly the New Testament teaching. Still, this is a development. It may be necessarily involved in the Christian revelation. But no impartial student of the life and teachings of Christ will come to the conclusion that when He reveals God to us that revelation consists in the doctrine of the Trinity. It is perfectly true, as Dr. Hatch and Professor Harnack have pointed out, that it is a long journey from the Sermon on the Mount to the Nicene Creed. That is not to say that the journey is illegitimate or that its goal is not consistent with its starting-point. Believers in the Trinity are convinced that the roots and grounds of that great doctrine may be discovered in the Gospels. To say this, however, is one thing, and to assert that Christ's revelation of God is in its very essence a declaration of the doctrine of the Trinity is another and a very different thing. Surely no reader of the Gospels can dream of making such an assertion. But the revelation of God in Christ is, as we have seen, the fundamental Christian

conception of God. Other truths of God, up to the most elaborate idea of the Trinity, may be deduced from the whole position involved in the life and work of Christ and their effects in the Church. But they are not the revelation. We must begin at the centre and source of the light of Christian truth in Christ Himself. This, then, is the question we have to ask: What conception of God do we derive from Christ?

II

The answer to this question was partly and provisionally suggested in the first chapter of the present volume. St. John, our Lord's most intimate disciple, discovered the truth that God is love by means of his intimate knowledge of Jesus. But now we must pursue this inquiry further and study more closely the gospel revelation of God in Christ. When we do so we discern one central truth, shining like the sun in a summer sky.

I cannot make this evident more effectually than by repeating what I wrote in an earlier work:—

"It is as true as it is obvious that our

Lord's revelation of God centres in His wonderful teaching about the divine fatherhood. Now, in some degree the fatherhood of God is a truth widely perceived by man. It is recognized by Homer, who describes Zeus as the 'father of gods and men.' In the Old Testament it frequently recurs, though usually with two limitations: first, it is connected with Israel, not with the whole human race; * second, for the most part it is applied to the nation as a corporate unit, not to individuals,† or if to any individual, to the divinely anointed king.‡ Later, the fatherly relation of God to all individual Israelites is seen, and the emergence of this idea registers a great advance.§ Thus the Wisdom of Solomon calls the just man 'the son of God.'‖ Nevertheless, in the Old Testament and in Jewish thought generally the supreme Kingship, the awful majesty of God, predominates, and the fatherhood is but subsidiary and only occasionally perceived at all. Jesus reverses the order, and sets the fatherhood of God in the first place, as that which is most essential, determining

* *E.g.* Hosea xi. 1.
† *E.g.* Jer. xxxi. 20.
‡ 2 Sam. vii. 14.
§ *E.g.* Mal. ii. 10.
‖ Wisdom ii. 18.

everything else. Thus, according to our Lord's revelation, the very authority and government of God are fatherly, and the essence of the divine functions of ruling and judging are determined by the divine fatherhood." *

Again :—

"In particular two or three features of our Lord's portraiture of the fatherhood of God should be considered.

"Clearly it suggests the most intimate relationship. Nothing is more painfully evident in later Judaism than the ever-widening gulf between God and the world, which originated in a well-meant attempt to exalt the Creator above the creation in abhorrence of heathen Pantheism, but which resulted in a cold, dreary Theism. The intermediate space was peopled with angels, who discharged the functions of Providence, because God was too exalted to come into immediate contact with man. On man's part formal acts of worship, regarded as meritorious on their own account, were substituted for the living communion of the soul with God, now made impossible by the vast separation between man and his Maker.

* "The Theology of the New Testament," pp. 43, 44.

All this Christ abolished, bringing men and women into closest contact with God, as members of God's family, as God's own children, and encouraging the utmost freedom of access to God in prayer and trust. This was one of the most revolutionary elements in the teaching of Christ. It gave His disciples a new heaven and a new earth —a heaven brought near from beyond the skies, an earth no longer God-deserted, but filled with God's presence.

"If we ask what attribute of the divine fatherhood Christ made most prominent, the answer must be that it was His love for His children. It is just to recollect that Jesus was speaking to Jews who already recognized the rectoral relationship of God to man. Had He been addressing light-hearted Greeks who did not sufficiently reverence authority in religion, no doubt He would have dwelt more on this characteristic. He presupposes the Old Testament.* Still, with Christ evidently the Father's care for His children is the leading thought about

* Therefore the Christian missionary to the heathen must take the Old Testament in his hand, as well as the New; the law and the prophets, as well as Christ; and this even to give a fair representation of the teaching of Christ.

God; this lies behind and determines all else. The very hairs of our head are all numbered by God. If He clothes the open fields with beauty, and feeds the wild ravens, and watches over the cheap sparrows, much more will He provide for His own children.* He is the one 'Good,'† and His goodness is seen chiefly in His kindness. 'If we, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, much more will God [who is not evil] give good things to them that ask Him.'‡ Accordingly, to be perfect like God is to love our enemies,§ which must mean that the crown of God's perfection is His love to His enemies.

"Another trait of Christ's portrait of the divine fatherhood is its universality. Most of our Lord's words concerning the fatherhood of God are addressed to His own disciples, and therefore to those who are already in happy relations of reconciliation with God. Moreover, He speaks of a certain condition of conduct being necessary —'that ye may be children of your Father which is in heaven.'‖ Similarly He owns

* Luke xii. 6, 24, 27.
† Mark x. 18.
‡ Matt. vii. 11.
§ Matt. v. 43–48.
‖ Matt. v. 45.

one who does the will of God as His brother, or sister, or mother,* which of course implies that He could not regard all mankind in the same light. On the other hand, all that He says of the nature and character of God suggests a breadth of fatherhood which cannot be confined to a section of mankind. The whole idea of the gospel springs from that conception of God's love to lost and sinful men which is just an outcome of His fatherly heart. Our Lord's description of God's indiscriminate kindness in providence is in accordance with the universality of His fatherhood—'For He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.'† The parable of the Prodigal Son presents the same idea most pointedly, especially when we consider that the immediate occasion of that parable was the harsh narrowness of the Pharisees who objected to Christ's freedom of brotherly intercourse with persons of ill repute.‡ These two positions may be easily reconciled. God is the Father of all mankind, loving all, kind to all, and calling all to Himself in the gospel. But His disobedient

* Mark iii. 55. † Matt. v. 45.

‡ Luke xx. 1, 2.

children do not enjoy the fatherly relationship excepting in their share of the general providence of God, and in the fact that it is open to them to have higher privileges. The prodigal son must come to himself before the fact that he has a father can mean anything to him. In his abandoned state he is worse off than the hirelings at home, and therefore practically no longer a son—lost, dead. His return is coming back to the experiences of sonship." *

Of course, it may be urged that since fatherhood and sonship are essentially correlative, the one must be conterminous with the other; and the sonship does appear to be limited. Not only is this implied by the conditions attached to it, to which attention has just been called, but in the Fourth Gospel there is a sharp contrast between two orders of men, the children of God and the children of the devil. It has been argued that we have here an indication of a dualism that is peculiar to the Johannine doctrine. The contrast of parentage, however, is not between God and Satan, but between Abraham and Satan. Here we cannot have two distinct races, because those whose father

* "The Theology of the New Testament," pp. 44–47.

was the devil were by race equally descendants of Abraham with those whom Jesus would allow to be Abraham's true children. Plainly a moral contrast is intended. We may illustrate it by the common Hebraism of sonship employed to indicate a characteristic in such expressions as "children of light," "sons of Belial." John the Baptist called his contemporaries a "generation of vipers" without any suggestion of serpent totemism. This is not the place in which to discuss questions of the historicity and doctrinal tendency of the Gospel of John. But I may remark in passing that if the peculiar thought of twofold parentage and sonship that we there meet with is wholly concerned with moral character, it cannot affect our ideas of God as the Universal Father.

III

When we pass on to the Apostolic teaching in the Epistles, there is much which at the first reading of it may suggest a limited sonship, and on the ground of this a correspondingly limited fatherly relation of God. St. Paul applies the Roman law of adoption to the Christian experience: "as many as are

led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."* It has been argued that the Apostle's reference is to the full status of sonship, in contrast with the condition of those who are only children under tutelage.† Thus he says in another place, "So that the law hath been our tutor to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor, for ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus."‡ This seems to mean that the child who had been under the tutor enters on the freer relations of sonship at a later stage of growth, development, education. But the thought is not the same here as in the Epistle to the Romans; for there St. Paul proceeds to explain the position, not by describing the child in the home growing out of tutelage, but by picturing the stranger brought into the family by adoption—a legally recognized and regulated process in Roman law.§ Evidently he who is a son by adoption was not a son previous to adoption.

* Rom. viii. 14; compare Gal. iii. 26.

† Garvie, Century Bible, "Romans," p. 191.

‡ Gal. iii. 24–26.

§ See Ramsay, "Historical Commentary on Galatians," p. 337.

But now with regard to this language of the Apostle, two things may be said. In the first place, it is important to notice that the statement is made by St. Paul, not by Jesus Christ. I do not suggest any conflict between the ideas of the Master and the disciple. Nevertheless, our final test is the revelation in Christ. Further consideration, however, will tend to show that the limitation here so plainly implied is not to be pressed into a denial of God's universal fatherhood. For first, let it be noted that even in the teachings of Christ we came upon differences between the apparent limitations of sonship and the unlimited fatherhood. Here, again, it is the sonship that is limited, not the fatherhood, and we saw that though strictly speaking the ideas are correlative, in the peculiar usage of them in the Gospels that is by no means the case. The fatherhood is wider than the sonship as there contemplated. Then may it not be the same with St. Paul's view of the double relationship? In his work on "The Fatherhood of God," Dr. Scott Lidgett argues for the universality of that relationship in the Apostle's teaching.* The breadth of the love of God in a

* Pp. 60–89.

universal gospel as preached by St. Paul implies as much. We must not stumble at the metaphor of adoption. After all, it was a metaphor introduced in order to illustrate a specific argument. When we take the Pauline writings as a whole, we see them abounding in passages that assert the fulness and the freedom of the love of God. In the Epistle to the Ephesians we read of "the Father, from whom every fatherhood* in heaven and on earth is named." †

Perhaps we may obtain the richest exposition of the idea of God as our Father after the teachings of Jesus from the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the very hardships of life are acknowledged to be wholesome chastisements, and therefore are taken as proofs of sonship and evidences of God's fatherly treatment of His children.‡ We know that we are God's children by reason of the very fact that we are chastised by Him. It may be said that this sonship is limited to Christians, because it is contrasted with the condition of bastards. But the writer does not say that any people actually are in that

* πατριά. † Eph. iii. 14.

‡ Heb. xii. 5–8.

condition. His language is purely hypothetical. Anyhow, the limitation, whether apparent or real, applies to the sonship. It is not affirmed of the fatherhood. That we saw was the case with St. Paul, as it had been the case in our Lord's own teaching. Now and again in various ways limitations seem to be made to the rights and privileges of sonship, which some enjoy while others are excluded from them, or which are not enjoyed at first, but are entered into in Christian experience. But nowhere do we meet with a hint as to a limitation of God's fatherly character or action. Wherever He is spoken of as Father the statement is unqualified and absolute.

In a strikingly original treatise on the *Apostles' Creed* Professor McGiffert brings forward a great deal of evidence to show that the first article of that historic document was intended to indicate God as the Universal Father, rather than to point to His relationship to the Second Person of the Trinity as the Father of Jesus Christ. The phrasing of the baptismal formula, on which the Creed is evidently moulded, may seem to some to conflict with that theory, since there we have the Son immediately following the

Father—" Baptizing them into the Name of the *Father* and of the *Son*," etc.—implying a mutual relationship in the Trinity. But, while we need not stay to argue out that fine question of exegesis, it is interesting to see, as Professor McGiffert has shown, that in the Early Church it was most common to think of God, not only in relation to mankind, but even in relation to the universe which He had created, as the Universal Father. Here we have echoes of the teaching of Jesus on the subject. Evidently it had left a lasting impression. In his popular work on the nature of Christianity Professor Harnack declares this to consist essentially in our Lord's revelation of God as our Father. In later utterances he has admitted that there are other truths which are also essential to the gospel. With many of us the redemption of the world by the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and eternal work of the ever-living Christ is the peculiar pith and core of the gospel. But then the root of that is God's fatherly relation and disposition towards mankind. It is just because God is our Father that He sent Christ to be our Redeemer. We cannot pass by the Christ element without which

we should not have Christianity. In practice we begin with it, as St. Paul indicates by his benediction: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God," etc., where Christ is named before God, because it is by Christ's grace that we enter into the heritage of God's love. That is the order of human experience; but it is not the order of divine action. Here the first thing is God's love, in which the whole process of redemption originates; and God's love rises out of the fountain of His fatherly heart. This, then, is the source and spring of the Christian gospel.

CHAPTER IV

Qualifications

I

THERE can be no possible question of the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ taught that God was our Father, nor that He set this truth in the forefront of His teaching about God. That fact is plain, palpable, unmistakable, writ large on almost every page of the Gospels. If it is disputed that He taught it, there is nothing in His teaching of which we can be certain.

Nevertheless, qualifications, limitations, balancing ideas are brought forward from various quarters, and it is possible to be so entangled in the consideration of them as almost to lose hold of the central truth, even after we have reached it. It is urged that there are other truths about God which must not be ignored if we would have a complete

conception of revelation. The neglect of those truths, it is said, will result in an essentially false theology, so one-sided and distorted will our conception be. We are even told that it is positively dangerous to dwell much on the thought of the divine fatherhood in the present state of the world, because this will lead to an abuse of the doctrine and encourage people in laxity of morals. Therefore, our critics assert, we must be careful to balance it well with a clear, powerful presentation of God's holiness, His righteousness, His justice, and the rectoral principles of His government. God is our Father; but we must not forget that He is our Father in heaven, our Holy Father. He loves us; but he is righteous: His justice must be satisfied.

Now, I fully sympathize with the feeling and purpose that lie behind these warnings. To lose sight of the holiness, righteousness, and justice of God, is to be fatally wrong in our thoughts of Him. A beaming benevolence does not satisfy the higher idea of Divinity. We do not regard the Cheruble brothers as having come nearest to the image of God in human character. There is a god-like righteousness in Savonarola's stern

denunciation of the sins of Florence at the corrupt time of the Medici. The Epistle to the Hebrews, which, as we have seen, gives us the richest conception of the fatherhood of God, also contains the sentence, "Our God is a consuming fire." *

The most terrible language descriptive of future punishment that is to be found anywhere in the Bible fell from the lips of Jesus. It may be said that in speaking of Gehenna, the unquenchable fire, the undying worm, the outer darkness, the few and the many stripes, wailing and gnashing of teeth, and destruction, He was only using current Jewish phrases and images, adding nothing of His own as a revelation; and further, that His object was not to describe these horrors on their own account, but to use them in giving point to His warnings concerning the sort of people who had most occasion to dread the future—not the publicans and sinners to whom its torments were complacently assigned by the religious folk of His day, but these religious folk themselves if they played the hypocrite, lived the double life, only talked religion without practising it. Still, He would not have employed such language at all if He

* Heb. xii. 29.

had not believed that it represented real terrors, against the danger of which people needed to be warned. The conceptions of future punishment here brought before us are all the more appalling when we consider that they are presented to us by the merciful Jesus; but then He would not have been merciful, if, believing in them, He had been silent about them in order to make His message agreeable. That is the cruel and cowardly mistake of the weak and insincere evangelist. The question of the ultimate fate of the lost and the possibility of final recovery, whether regarded as "the larger hope," or settled to the theologian's satisfaction as dogmatic universalism, should not distract our attention from the subject now before us; nor, of course, does the abandonment of the notion of a physical, local hell, with material fire and bodily torment, affect the case. The essential point is that Jesus used most awful words about the doom of those who come under the condemnation of God. All this, then, we are told is to be considered as a set-off against the doctrine of the fatherhood of God.

But apart from the idea of punishment we are reminded that righteousness is higher

than happiness, and that ease and comfort are poor, low objects of desire compared with purity and justice. Undoubtedly that is the case. In the present day, when we are possessed with a horror of pain, our temptation is to idolize the anodyne, as though chloroform and morphia were Heaven's best gifts to earth. We have to learn that there is a baptism of fire as well as a fiery judgment, a consuming of chaff and a separating of dross as well as a burning up of tares. But where is all this in conflict with the idea of God as our Father?

II

These criticisms and objections have a serious bearing on feeble, faulty conceptions of fatherhood, and they are of value for the rebuke of such conceptions. But they have no weight whatever against the purest, loftiest idea of God as our Father.

Take first the truth of the sovereignty of God. He is our Father, it is admitted; but then we should not forget that He is also our King. Now, this solemn advice, so often repeated, is curiously blind to the reflection

it casts equally on the ideas of fatherhood and of kingship. It degrades them both.

In the first place, it implies that a father is essentially a weak, indulgent parent, after the pattern of the undignified *paterfamilias* of humorous literature. But there are many kinds of fathers, and many conceptions of his authority in the family. A Roman father had a right to kill his son if he so willed. A Hindoo father is the recognized lord of his house. Chinamen are taught to reverence their parents as divinities. In claiming filial duties from Israel, according to Malachi, God complains of the neglect He has received in contrast with the honour that a son gives to his father.* The true father is sovereign in his own house, or, if we must be exact, in the perfect family father and mother rule together over their children. But, then, as Theodore Parker rightly taught, God combines in His nature and in His relation to us motherhood together with fatherhood. Since He is our sole Supreme Parent we might think of Him as our Father and Mother in one. The parent who does not rule his children is failing in his duty as a parent. His weak, indulgent negligence detracts

* Mal. i. 6.

from the perfection of his fatherhood. It is not necessary to say that God is our King as well as our Father, because if He is our perfect Father He must be our King. The kingship is included in the fatherhood.

Again, we are sometimes reminded that we owe a submission to God which we do not owe to our human parents. When a child comes to years of judgment he ceases to retain the obligation of implicit obedience to his father and mother, although he is rarely emancipated from the duty of honouring them—from the more fundamental obligation to treat them with reverence and consideration. Even that emancipation may come in the case of utterly unworthy parents. The selfish, brutal, dissolute parent cannot command the respect and has no right to demand the compliance of children who have minds and characters of their own. But in that ghastly situation the very conception of the normal family relationship has disappeared, while the ties of nature still demand love and service and sacrifice. With the best of earthly fathers there is a limit to paternal authority. We do not now grant to them the old Roman rights. Conscience is supreme above all parental claims. The child must do what

he knows to be right and must refuse to do what he knows to be wrong, even at the risk of disobedience to his parent. He must not hand his conscience over to the keeping of anybody—even his father. Here, then, we have a plain limit to the kingly rights of fatherhood. The father is not to be an absolute despot in his own house. Indeed, if he is a sensible man, he will interfere with his children as little as possible; he will be glad to see them developing self-reliance; he will reverence their consciences.

But now what we see here is not something that we need to carry over to the divine fatherhood as a corresponding limitation. For God is the perfect Father. He never errs, never issues a mistaken command, never sets His will in conflict with a truly enlightened conscience. The will of God is just that with which we ought to bring our consciences into harmony. Here, too, however, we are not kept under formal restraints, commanded only to obey definite orders. God gives us room, leaves us, in a way, to ourselves, lets our mind and judgment have scope for choice and decision. But if in this way we see a limit to His fatherhood—though

a limit which He Himself assigns—that limit is not there on account of His sovereignty, but for the sake of our liberty. There is this difference, that the human father is not only limited by his child's rights, but also by the rights of God, and some would add the rights of society, of which he is a member, while God's fatherhood has no such limitations, although in His wisdom and goodness He grants us a certain range and liberty. This, however, again I must observe, is not a qualifying of the fatherly idea with the kingly; it is an enlargement of the scope of that fatherly idea. In other words, God's fatherhood differs from human fatherhood in being perfect fatherhood — complete, unfettered, unchecked by reference to any higher authority.

In the second place, while the admonition that started these reflections is thus seen to be based on an unworthy idea of fatherhood, and to melt away when the true perfection and splendour of the idea of God as our Father is conceived, it is equally derogatory to the idea of perfect kingship. Surely the best conception of a king is of one who is the father of his people. Our objection to a paternal government is not grounded on the

family conception of the State which it implies, but it is based on its destruction of liberty. No earthly monarch is capable of dealing wisely with a nation as a father, with his much smaller domain, may deal with his children. Besides, even if the superhuman genius equal to the vast requirements of such a post were to be found, it would not be a good thing for the State that his subjects should be treated as children. This would hinder the healthy development of political life in the community. In exceptional circumstances, and where a higher race is called upon to rule a lower, this may be best. For a time a civilized people may rule a barbarous people paternally for their benefit. The difficulties of the British rule in India arise from the fact that there we have paternal government imposed on a civilized people. But our trouble does not arise from the kindliness associated with the idea of fatherhood; it comes from the restraints of Imperialism, with the additional evil that those restraints are imposed by the exercise of an alien authority, however beneficent the intentions of that authority may be. That is to say, the objections to a paternal government are

not that it has not enough of the notion of sovereignty in it, but that it has too much of that notion.

III

If we abandon the paternal idea, but do not lessen the governmental, we approach the pure despot. Now, is it to be supposed that God would be a more perfect and adorable Supreme Lord if He ruled the universe without full consideration for the well-being of His creatures? The limitation of the fatherly element in favour of the kingly can only mean that. Yet we cannot regard an Oriental Sultan of the old style as our model sovereign. A Pharaoh ruling over a nation of slaves is not the sovereign whom we can think of as most Godlike, if we are to go to Christ for our highest idea of God. But to separate the kingly element in God from the paternal is to represent Him as a Sultan who thinks first of His own pleasure, not as the worthy Monarch who rules for the good of His people. Jesus epitomized His vocation when He said, "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life as

a ransom for many ;" * and we can have no higher idea of the nature of God than the character of Jesus. The ideal king is the servant of the State—the servant, not the slave.† He lives and works to benefit his people, as a father toils for the sake of his family. He is most a king when he is most a father. We honour the memory of Queen Victoria when we think of her as the mother of her people. Even God's kingship is greatest to us, not when we put His bare sovereignty first, in the manner of John Calvin, but when we regard Him as a fatherly King, or, better still, as the perfect Father ruling His own house in wisdom and love.

Another phase of the caution that we started out to consider does not require such lengthy treatment, since it may be met with virtually the same answer as that which I have endeavoured to set forth in the preceding paragraphs. We are reminded that God is not only our Father, but our heavenly, holy, righteous Father. But is not that saying that He is our perfect Father? For can any one be perfect even as a father unless he is of perfect character? Jesus Christ

* Mark x. 45. † διάκονος, not δοῦλος.

contrasts our defective fatherhood with the perfection of God's fatherhood when He says, "If ye then, *being evil*, know how to give good gifts to your children," etc. But over against that He does not describe God as *being good;* He simply refers to Him as "your Father which is in heaven," * because the ideal fatherhood involves goodness. God would be less than a true Father if He were not just. If He had failed in righteousness He would have been so much short of fatherhood. When we address Him as righteous Father, we only add something to what we should mean when we simply addressed Him as Father because we are familiar with unworthy forms of fatherhood among men who are not righteous. For this reason it seems to me to be no easy task for a modest parent to preach on the fatherhood of God. He cannot hold himself up as a type of the Divine. His own character seems to cast a shadow on the image of God. He can only adjust the parallel by using our Lord's *à fortiori* argument, "if ye, *being evil*," etc., "how much more will God," etc. It may be necessary to insert the adjective "righteous" because we are so blinded and confused

* Matt. vii. 11.

by the imperfection of fatherhood among men who are "evil" as to forget its presence in the perfect fatherhood of God; we need to be reminded that God will only do what is right, that He cannot endure wickedness, that He is grieved and angered by His children's sin, that He will see to the execution of justice. Therefore we call Him Righteous Father. Nevertheless, His righteousness is contained in the idea of His perfect fatherhood.

It is the same with the ascription of holiness to God. This may be associated with our Lord's more frequent mention of heavenliness. God is our heavenly Father, our Father in heaven. This expression indicates how far He must be above us, not of course locally, nor merely in might and wisdom and royal supremacy, but chiefly in perfect goodness. We are abashed and humbled before the awful purity of God. Even when we think of Him as our Father this feeling is right and proper. The vision of God in His holiness reveals the shame and stain of our sin. Any conception of the fatherhood of God that obscured that great truth of His nature would be faulty and dishonouring to His name. He is indeed our

righteous and holy Father because He is our perfect Father.

IV

There is another consideration which does not involve any qualification of the idea of the fatherly character of God, but which needs to be taken together with it; and it is the neglect of this that has raised up some opposition to the gospel of the divine fatherhood. While that is the most fundamental truth of revelation and the greatest, it is not the only truth, nor in the proclamation of the evangelical message is it usually the truth which first arrests attention or that which finally conquers heart and soul and will. Professor Harnack has written of it as though it were the essence of Christianity. In the middle of the last century George Macdonald made a similar conception popular in England. But then the preaching novelist was protesting against a narrow type of Evangelicanism in which God appeared mainly as a stern Ruler condemning the world, whose wrath was placated by the intercession of His Son, so that all the winsomeness was in Christ, without whom

the thought of God was only a terror. George Macdonald followed Erskine and McCleod Campbell and Maurice in protest against this travesty of the gospel. To many people who had been brought up under the gloom of the then prevalent perversion of evangelical doctrine, the effect of such teaching as theirs was like fresh air and wholesome sunshine and spring flowers for prisoners in a dungeon.

To-day we live in the emancipation that these men secured for English Christianity. Surely we are grateful for it. We can walk at large under God's heaven and breathe freely. But now we have to see that there is more in Christianity than some people in the ecstasy of their relief from a harsh and cruel creed have been ready to perceive.

While Jesus revealed the fatherly nature of God He taught much besides. At first He preached the message of the kingdom of God, and said little about Himself. But all the while He was drawing personal disciples. His earliest call was "Follow Me"; He promised blessedness to those who were persecuted for His sake, and assured His hearers that no one who gave but a cup of water to one of His friends

in His name would go unrewarded. To do what He said was to build on the rock; not to do it was to build on the sand. He invited the labouring and heavy laden to come to Him for rest. Such teaching, and the life and action accompanying it, taken together, with its influence and the way it has worked and is working in the world, point not so much to Professor Harnack's definition of the gospel, as to Presensé's famous sentence, "Christianity is Christ." When we go on to the Fourth Gospel we have a representation of the faith which is confessedly Christo-centric. There Christ is the Light of the World, the Bread of Life, the Good Shepherd, the True Vine, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In Matthew and Mark He says that He gives His life a ransom for many; in John that He lays down His life for the sheep.

The New Testament history and the Apostolic writings show that the impression made by Jesus on His friends was along these lines. When He was taken from them by death—although the fatherhood of God remained—they were plunged into despair; when He appeared after the resurrection—although He gave no new revelation of the

nature and character of God—they sprang up to the height of glad enthusiasm. The preaching of the primitive evangelists was on the same lines. Critics who are doubtful about the historicity of the first half of the Acts of the Apostles, admit that Peter's speeches therein recorded contain the early type of Apostolic preaching.* What, then, is the essence of Peter's message? It is this: "Repent ye, and be baptized, every one of you, in the Name of Jesus Christ, unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"; † and this: "Unto you first God, having raised up His Servant, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities"; ‡ and again this: "For neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among man, wherein we must be saved." § The Acts of the Apostles abounds in such passages. Evidently they give us the pith and substance of the primitive gospel. But if so, we are not in another atmosphere when we find St. Paul writing to the Corinthians: "For I determined not"—*i.e.* I did not determine—"to know

* *E.g.* Schmiedel.
† Acts ii. 38.
‡ *Ibid.*, iii. 26.
§ *Ibid.*, iv. 12.

anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified"; * and to the Galatians: "O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth, crucified?" † or when he exclaims, "To me to live is Christ." ‡ It is not far from this to St. John when he writes in his absolute way, "He that hath the Son, hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life." § When we read St. Paul's Epistles—especially those of self-revelation (Romans, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Philippians)—and feel the power and passion of the great Apostle's devotion to Christ, it would seem that all his thoughts and affections and aims were wrapped up in it. After this we are not surprised that the theological discussions of the Church in the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries —the period of the formation of Christian theology—chiefly turned on the old question, "What think ye of Christ?" The early disciples felt the spell of Jesus; that spell has been on the Church ever since; it has made the Church; it has made Christianity.

This, then, must be kept in mind if we

* 1 Cor. ii. 2.
† Gal. iii. 1.
‡ Phil. i. 21.
§ 1 John v. 12.

would preserve the balance of truth. No acknowledgment of God's fatherly character without it will give us the New Testament gospel or the gospel which has won converts and built up saints. Nevertheless—after giving it full recognition as vital to our faith—I affirm with equal distinctness that it in no way limits or qualifies the truth of God's fatherly relations with us, which Jesus Christ made clear in His teaching. It simply warns us against the misuse of that great truth, against the misapplication of it. Christ is what He is to us in order that He may restore to us the happy consciousness of sonship so that we may live in the light of God our Father.

CHAPTER V

Personality

I

THUS far our consideration of the idea of God in Christian thought has been confined to Biblical sources, and more especially to what we may perceive in the Person and life of Jesus Christ as affording us the supreme revelation of the Divine. But it is impossible to keep this subject apart from conceptions derived from other sources or from the critical methods that are applied to all knowledge. Now, immediately we permit these influences to flow in and play upon our purely Biblical and primarily Christian idea of God as our Father in heaven, difficulties arise demanding our attention.

II

The greatest objection brought forward in this way is that the idea is anthropomorphic. We are said to be only exhibiting the limitations of our own minds when we speak of God in terms of man. Primitive man attributes human passions to inanimate objects. The animism of the savage is due not so much to the wealth of his imagination as to its limitations. Because he has a conscious soul he assumes that all things have conscious souls. He has not gone far enough in the cultivation of his faculty of discrimination to perceive the difference between the animate and the inanimate. Similarly primitive man imagines his god to be like himself. He has not gone far enough to discriminate between the human and the Divine. But by degrees, as it advances, the race comes on to more critical and refined thinking in its theology, and as it thus progresses it sheds more and more of its crude anthropomorphism.

We have evidence of this in the Old Testament. There are many Old Testament passages in which God is referred to as though He had a human body. Thus

He is described as sitting on His throne in heaven, as bending down to earth, and even on occasion coming down and visiting the children of men. Jehovah appears as one of the three strangers whom Abraham mistakes for men, so entirely human is their aspect. We read of the arms, the hands, the eyes, the ears of God. Primitive sacrifice suggests the notion that the Divinity shares the feast with the offerer, the smoke going up to heaven for his benefit; then he smells the savour of it. But while notions such as these underlie the Biblical language we must not suppose that the prophets who used it always, or perhaps ever, understood it in the grossly literal sense. All living language among civilized peoples contains survivals of more barbarous forms of thought and speech. None of us can speak of abstract subjects without the use of metaphors drawn from the concrete. In making this very remark I am illustrating it. To speak of *drawing* a metaphor is to suggest the action of pulling a thing from one place to another—a physical movement in space. The Oriental far excels the less poetic Western in his use of figurative language. He habitually thinks in pictures. We only

show ourselves to be stupidly prosaic when we interpret the highly imaginative language of the Hebrew writers in a dull matter-of-fact way. Although it must be granted that the earlier traditions contain very materialistic notions, it is not to be supposed that when the inspired prophets of later ages use similar language they are not emancipated from its materialism. For the ripe Hebrew thought of the spiritual nature of God we may go to sublime utterances such as that of the hundred and thirty-ninth Psalm, or the fortieth chapter of Isaiah.

III

In spite of this, and in spite of our Lord's saying by Jacob's well, when He repudiated the idea of localizing the worship of God either at the Samaritans' sacred mountain or in the Jews' holy city—"God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth," Christians have repeatedly fallen back into grossly materialistic conceptions of God. Tertullian treated the "substance" of God as material. In the fourth century there were monks of the Scetic desert who were in a frantic rage

at the teaching of the school of Origen, which maintained the pure spirituality of God, rushing into the cities and exclaiming that it had taken away their God. These extravagant, ignorant monks were condemned by the Church as "Anthropomorphists." In Russia, at the time of Peter the Great, the Old Believers protested against the Tsar's introduction of the Western fashion of shaving, on the ground that this was effacing the image of God. As late as the year 1836 one of these fanatics wrote: "The image of God is the beard, and the likeness the moustache." This Russian superstition is associated with the adoration of icons, God the Father being represented as an elderly bearded man. It is said that the Mormons believe that God has a bodily form which is confined to a definite place, so that He is not present everywhere at the same time.

IV

When all these materialistic conceptions are repudiated, and God is regarded as entirely of a spiritual nature, there are still anthropomorphisms, some of which are more

unworthy than others. It is characteristic of Paganism to represent the gods and goddesses as magnified men and women with all the passions and vices of the human world. The Greek mythology was denounced by the early Christians for its outrageous immorality, the Hellenic divinities being quite unrestrained in their conduct compared with average civilized men. The Old Testament idea of God, even where it is most crude and imperfect, generally insists on His righteousness. More remarkable than the henotheism, and, later, the monotheism, of the Jewish faith, is its ethical character. But this in itself may be regarded as anthropomorphic, since conscience is an integral element of human nature. The Old Testament goes much further than this in ascribing to God the feelings and motives that are found in men. It mentions not only such gracious attributes as His loving-kindness, long-suffering, and compassion, but also the less pleasing features of anger, envy, jealousy. These should be regarded with discrimination. For instance, the divine anger as righteous indignation with sin is very different from the uncontrollable rage of a man who is

offended by some insult or injury to his person or interests. Then the jealousy of God may be regarded as His just objection to the worship of unworthy objects, to the degradation of polytheism. Considerations such as these should modify our views of the later Israelite's ascription of various passions to Jehovah. But when we have given full weight to them we must admit that they leave us with a lower and narrower idea of the divine nature than that which we derive from Christ and meet with in the New Testament. This is no surprising thing, for if the Old Testament contained the full revelation we should not have needed the New. The Christian has no call to defend the crudities of the more primitive stages of the religious ideas that only reach their culmination in the gospel.

This, however, will not satisfy those who charge the Christian conception itself with anthropomorphism. It is taken for granted that God must be "without parts or passions"—that is to say, first, that there are no divisions, or differences, or varieties of being in the nature of God, but that His perfection implies uniformity and identity in all respects; and, secondly, that nothing

in the form of emotion must be ascribed to Him, that His infinite ocean of being must never be ruffled by a wave of feeling. The first of these positions will come before us later when we are considering the doctrine of the Trinity. Therefore I will say nothing about it here. But the second is in direct opposition to the Christian conception of God. Now, leaving out of account those emotions which might be deemed unworthy, let us consider how the case stands with the nobler emotions. We certainly understand that feeling is essential to the idea of personality. Von Hartmann's intellect working in the universe without feeling is rightly named "the unconscious." Schopenhauer's idea of "will" as the source of all existence—a will, so to speak, suspended in the air, with no basis of consciousness—is really misnamed, for true will is conscious, and consciousness involves feeling. If you are to banish the idea of feeling from your conception of the Divine Being you must give up the thought of personality. The tendency both of Stoic ethics and of Hindoo philosophy is in this direction. But both are based on assumptions concerning what is worthy of the

highest existence; and it is these very assumptions that the Christian must challenge. Here we are in a region where human analogies rightly come in, for we can only think of what is more or less worthy by comparison with what we value amongst ourselves. But thus presented the question is not merely ethical, nor is it purely religious or metaphysical. It is largely æsthetic. It is concerned with the seemly, and the seemliness demanded is essentially Oriental. In the Far East the ideal of perfection is realized as the calm, impassive Buddha. But Catholicism has tried to picture its finest type in the compassionate Mother, in the Mother of Sorrows. It is a matter of taste which we should prefer. With such variations of valuation in the human world is it not too much to expect us to take it for granted that the Buddhist ideal must be applied to God? The paradox of the situation is accentuated when we remember that the Buddhist himself does not believe in the existence of God.

V

This objection to the ascription of certain personal attributes to God is broadened

out to cover any kind of personality. We are told that the very conception of personality is anthropomorphic. We are personal; therefore we assume that God is personal. For the same reason the savage thinks the sun, the moon, the trees, the rivers to be personal. We have abandoned the animism of the savage with respect to Nature, because we have found a more rational conception in science. But, it is said, we retain it in theology, simply because we have not been able to apply the solvent of science to it there. Yet, it is added, the anthropomorphism is equally baseless here also.

Now, the Christian thinker may approach this objection with a preliminary thought which will make it the less alarming. He believes that man is made in the image of God. If he is right in that belief, he may turn it round and say that God has characteristics which correspond to the image of man. Likeness must be mutual. If A. is like B., B. must be like A. Of course it may be denied that man is made in the image of God; the very assertion of the fact in Genesis may be set down to the account of Semitic anthropomorphism. Still, the Christian conception must be taken in its entirety in order

to be judged fairly. We must recognize its two aspects. It holds that there is an essential resemblance between the human and the Divine because the former was made after the pattern of the latter, and therefore it concludes that to some extent we may come to know the Divine by comparison with the human. If I have been made in any respect like God, I can know God to some extent by studying myself. The specific Christian conception of the fatherhood of God involves the same thought. The child may venture to believe in a family likeness between himself and his parent.

I do not bring these considerations forward as answers to the objection now confronting us; but I think they should be in our mind when we are considering it, so that the whole case may be complete. The Christian contention is that a certain degree of anthropomorphism in our ideas of God is a necessary correlative of a certain amount of deo-morphism in our ideas of man.

VI

But we must return to the bare idea of personality. The ultimate objection to it

is that it is inconsistent with the infinity of God. Personality involves certain definite attributes. But, we are told, definition implies limitation. Therefore the infinite, being unlimited, cannot be defined, cannot be possessed of definite attributes, and in particular cannot have the essential attributes of personality.

Here we find ourselves fairly launched on a metaphysical ocean of speculation. Before proceeding to sound a dim and perilous way across it, we may pause a moment and ask ourselves whether we are really committed to so tremendous a voyage of discovery, and that without chart or compass and with no pilot on whose experience we can rely. Is there not an alternative, though a humbler, course? The Ritschlian would warn us off from metaphysics when in pursuit of religious knowledge. He tells us that our knowledge of God must come to us along historical lines, from the historic Person of Christ, and that we must not permit any metaphysical speculations to interfere with the knowledge gained in this way. It is possible to join the pragmatic philosophy on to this Ritschlian historical method. Indeed, Ritschl himself prepares for such a process; for he

holds that we can only understand the Christian revelation through an experience of redemption in association with the common experience of the redeemed Church. All this has nothing to do with metaphysics.

On the other hand, there are minds so constituted that they must seek to correlate all truth. Such minds refuse to receive a historical and pragmatic impression which appears to them to be in conflict with metaphysical truth. This means that they have a previous conviction of metaphysics, that they come to the study of the Christian revelation with a certain philosophical bias. And it means more. It means also that they are more certain that their philosophy is right than that the Christian revelation is true. But is the metaphysical position so sure as that? For such people to assume that it is so is to pay a high compliment to their own intellects. But are they justified in paying them such a compliment? May we not venture to repeat to these confident philosophers what Cromwell said to the Presbyterian divines: "I beseech you by the mercies of Christ, consider it possible that you may be mistaken."

No doubt the ultimate theology must

agree with the ultimate philosophy. But we have no ground for asserting that either theology or philosophy has yet reached its final stage of development, and meanwhile either of them may be suspected of sometimes going astray. If that should be the case, the inevitable consequence would be a conflict between the two. Then, while that conflict was going on, what justification should we have for siding with philosophy, when, after all, it might turn out that it was the theology that was nearer the truth? It would be both wiser and more modest to follow each on its own lines as far as we could feel our way along them, and wait patiently for the final reconciliation.

If it is imperative that the idea of personality should be contrasted with the idea of infinity as mutually exclusive, so that both could not possibly hold the field at the same time, why should we assume that it is the former that must give way? Are we quite certain that it might not be the latter? If God cannot be both personal and infinite, why should we shrink from saying that He is personal and therefore finite; rather than that He is infinite and therefore impersonal? Have we more evidence for the infinity of

God than we have for His personality? Should we ever worship more profoundly an unconscious infinity than we should worship a supremely great and good Person of whom we could not say that in no respect had He any limits?

VII

The reason for believing in the infinity of God is purely metaphysical. Kant showed that it could not be derived from the contemplation of His works in Nature. Vast as the universe is when revealed to us by telescope and microscope, and immeasurably vaster than all we can see of it the stretches of its unknown regions may be, we have no proof that it is illimitable. Therefore inconceivably great as must be the first cause and sustaining power and wisdom beneath and in it all, this requisite greatness does not amount to infinity. We think of God as infinite because if He exists at all there is nothing to limit His being anywhere and everywhere. But the thought lands us in metaphysical regions where the limits of our own minds are soon reached. We have not wings to soar into

the empyrean heights nor eyes to pierce the abysmal depths of an existence which we deem to be infinite. We judge on *à priori* grounds that it can have no limit, but immediately we have asserted this conviction we lose ourselves in helpless confusion.

For consider what we understand by "the Infinite." We are told that there cannot be two infinites. Is that so? Suppose a line projected to infinity. Then you have an infinite line. Let another line be laid by its side, and the same process repeated. Have you not two infinites? The line, however, is an abstraction, impossible in Nature. You cannot really have length without breadth. Suppose, then, a row of marbles, and imagine it extended to infinity. You have an infinite number of marbles. Then start another row of marbles by its side, and repeat the process. Now you have two infinite numbers of marbles. It will be said that you can never complete the rows, because it would require infinite time to do it, and infinite time is never completed. But this is only to make the very thought of the infinite difficult; if, however, you could have an infinite series produced simultaneously, or with infinite rapidity, or eternally existing,

you might have two such series, or any number up to infinity. Now, an infinity of parallel lines of no thickness will of course give you no thickness; but an infinity of the least thickness will give you an infinite plain, which will be an infinite of infinites. You may go further, and think of a second plain above this, and so on *ad infinitum.* But the idea of an infinity of infinite plains means an infinite number of an infinite number of infinite lines. There you have three dimensions of space—each infinite. But the mathematicians suggest the possibility of more—of four, five, any number up to infinity; and so again you get another infinite multiplication. Next, import the idea of time. These infinite existences may be thought of as existing for an infinitesimal moment, or for two such moments, up to an infinite number. There is therefore another infinite multiplication. Again, all this may be multiplied by division into the infinitesimal both in space and in time. The cube, the plain, the line, may be halved, quartered, and continually sub-divided to an infinite degree. Once more, then, you multiply the infinites infinitely.

To all this it may be replied that we are

only playing with notions, for space and time may be only forms of thought, not realities of the universe. This, however, does not affect the properties of the abstract conception of infinity. And we may take another course. We may think of infinite power and infinite wisdom. These are two infinites. Neither includes the other; yet the existence of neither precludes the existence of the other. If Samson's prior existence did not prevent Solomon from coming into being, so neither is there anything in the nature of things to prevent a Samson being as wise as Solomon, or a Solomon being as strong as Samson. In limited beings a duality or a plurality of qualities can co-exist. What, then, is to prevent them from co-existing in an infinite Being? But if so, have we not a duality or a plurality of infinites?

VIII

It will be said that not only is there a plurality, there is an infinity of existence in the Infinite. Here, then, the case is reversed. Instead of denying that God has no qualities because He is infinite, it is asserted that He

has all qualities. But this cannot be, if the law of contradictions is to govern our judgment in the case. God cannot be both good and bad; for goodness excludes badness. If He were bad He would cease to be good; while He is good, certainly He is not bad. Then badness is excluded from the being of God. It may be said that badness is no quality, that it is merely the absence of goodness, as darkness is the absence of light. Then let us be more explicit. Hatred is certainly a positive quality. If God is love, He cannot have hatred. Surely then we must understand that according to the Christian conception God is not infinite in all respects. The same may be said of any form of Theism except Pantheism. If God is not identical with the universe, the existence of the universe involves a limitation to the Being of God in certain respects. Of His own will, as Creator of all, He makes that which is not Himself and of which He is not.

Now, there are various philosophical ways of meeting these paradoxes. We might follow the Kantian line of criticism, and, meeting with nothing but antimonies, conclude that we could not reach truth by any

process of pure reason owing to the limitation of our own minds; or we might follow the more daring Hegelian thought which welcomes the contradictions as in each case both true, because both leading to a higher synthesis—if we could understand what that meant; or we might take some other metaphysical lines of thought which it is not necessary for me to recapitulate, because they would all lead us to the same conclusion. That conclusion is that these conceptions of the Infinite are so full of difficulty and confusion of thought that they serve more to reveal the limitations of our own minds than to explain anything concerning the Being of God, and, therefore, that to employ them as checks on the conclusions drawn from the Christian revelation is only to hinder the more sure in deference to the less sure.

Much of this trouble comes from the awe of abstractions. People take an attribute, attach the definite article to it, and forthwith endow it with a dignity and an authority which they will not attribute to concrete things and persons. "*The* Infinite" looms before us with a majesty that is all the more crushing for the fact that it is vague, intangible, even inconceivable. But to be

honest with ourselves, let us admit once for all that we know nothing of "*the* Infinite," that we cannot even picture to ourselves in imagination what we mean by the term, that therefore it is not reasonable to permit a predicated notion which we cannot grasp to dominate our thinking in regions that are more within our comprehension.

The case will become clearer if we leave the fog of so vague a term and come to definite conceptions of infinity and confront them with definite conceptions of personality. Let us begin with the latter.

Without attempting to construct an exact definition of the word "person" we may at least lay our fingers on certain definite ideas that it contains. In the first place, then, we may say that it contains the idea of consciousness. We could not call an unconscious automaton personal. Further, for the full conception of personality we require self-consciousness. This is one of the distinguishing marks of a human being in contrast with a mere animal. We do not credit a horse or a dog with the attribute of self-consciousness. We do not think of the most intelligent of the brute creation recognizing itself as an ego, making an object of

itself in thought. It may be that consciousness is universally diffused through Nature; not only may the humblest of protozoa have a feeling of pleasure in absorbing food and of pain in starvation or in being devoured by other creatures; we cannot say but that a flower feels some dim delight in welcoming the warmth of the morning sun, some vague pain in shrinking before the touch of frost. Perhaps we might go farther, and suppose that there was a flickering consciousness in the crystal, a sense of comfort and satisfaction as its particles arranged themselves in smooth facets, an irk and sense of hurt when they are smashed by the stonebreaker's hammer. We have no proof that consciousness, which in our highly differentiated organisms requires brain and nerves nourished with a constant flow of fresh blood, may not be generally diffused through the whole fabric of less highly organized creatures and even through the molecules of the inorganic. For aught we know, a certain cosmic consciousness may be co-extensive with the physical universe and conterminous with matter. Nevertheless, as far as our observation and experience extend, self-consciousness appears to be limited to mankind.

Therefore only to allow of a cosmic consciousness that falls short of our own consciousness on this vital point is not to allow of a personal God. For God to be personal He must be something more than the sum of this diffused cosmic consciousness; He must be self-conscious, as we are self-conscious in the realizing of our own personality. Two other ideas enter into our notion of a person, although perhaps at the root of them these are one. I mean deliberate thinking and voluntary acting. The first is the faculty of directing our own thoughts, working out a problem, reasoning; the second is the power of choice and decision in action, free will. We should not call a conscious being who was wholly lacking in both of these powers in the full sense of the word a person. At all events, the personality in such a case would be checked and paralyzed with respect to its most important functions. The lunatic who was altogether a slave to fixed ideas or quite abandoned in thought to aimless reverie, or who had absolutely lost all will-power, would be so much the less a person. If, then, we say that God is a Person, we mean that He is conscious, that He is self-conscious, that He thinks out

His own great thoughts, that He decides and wills His own glorious deeds. When, further, we add to all this what is the crowning glory of personality—character, the choice of the good, truth, righteousness, love—we complete the thought of God as the supreme moral Personality.

IX

Now let us turn to the other side of the problem and break up the idea of the Infinite, with its meaningless pretentiousness, and come to close quarters with some of the several qualities of which infinitude can be predicated. We think of space, time, power, wisdom, goodness as being infinite, although, perhaps, some of these qualities, such as wisdom, and certainly goodness, had better be described as perfect. Now, which of these qualities in its infinity should we suppose to exclude personality? Take the first—space. We think of our own consciousness as located where our bodily presence is. But that is because it is attached to our bodies. This is a limitation of the capacity of our personality. There is nothing in the idea of consciousness or of self-consciousness

to exclude the notion of universal presence. We can enlarge the thought of a consciousness which extends through all things and is in contact with them all. We cannot imagine how a being with this vast faculty of consciousness would think. But that is only because our limited consciousness is so very different. There is nothing in the idea of consciousness to exclude the possibility. It is the same with time. If it is possible for consciousness to last sixty, seventy, or eighty years, there is nothing in the nature of the case to prevent it from lasting for ever. But we usually think of eternity as timeless, and of God's consciousness as an ever-present contemplation of what we only know in succession, all the ages of the history of the universe being under His gaze at once. I am not aware of any reason for assuming this to be the nature of eternity and of God's relation to it. For anything I can see He may move along a stream of time as we do. Or it may be that both time and space are forms of thought into the mould of which our intellects are necessarily cast, but outside which God's infinite mind moves freely, they being nothing to Him. Whichever way we contemplate the amazing possibilities of the

divine thought, there is nothing in the infinity of the two states to exclude the idea of consciousness or of personality.

When we come to infinite power, the almightiness of God, it is obvious that there is nothing in it inconsistent with personality. If a being with a certain amount of power can act personally, the indefinite multiplication of his ability to act could not affect his personality. When we say that God is almighty we mean that He can do whatever He wills. How could such a facility of action limit the person who exercised the will? Infinite wisdom actually presupposes personality, and so does the moral character of God, His holiness, justice, love. Only a person can be wise and good.

We may be met with a difficulty in another direction. We think of our own consciousness as always existing each moment at one point. We find it hard to imagine how a universally diffused consciousness can be self-conscious. But modern psychology may help us here. This has proved that our own consciousness is not so simple as we had supposed. It may be split into strata. It seems to rest on unconscious thought, which in turn now and again emerges into

consciousness. We appear to think as our eyes see, with a central point of attention, but with a background and surrounding circle of ideas fading off into obscurity. Moreover, the current of consciousness moves on, if we may so say, like a comet with a stream of radiance behind it. We think with the memory of immediately previous thinking in mind, as well as with a cloud of associations hovering round. Now, while we know this of our own very limited consciousness, what right have we to say that if there be consciousness in an infinite being this must be limited to a point or a stream of ideas? There is nothing in the essential conception of personality to exclude its infinite expansiveness.

In all these considerations the haunting danger is that we should limit the very idea of personality to our own individual experience of personality. The fact may be that the limitations of which we are conscious are consequences of the imperfection of our personality. It may be, as Lotze says, that "Perfect Personality is in God only, to all finite minds there is allotted but a pale copy thereof; the finiteness of the finite is not a producing condition of this

Personality, but a limit and a hindrance of its development." *

This point is vital to our subject, especially in the present day when the fascination of the Neoplatonic spirit is renewing its influence. Once again we see people endeavouring to become enraptured with the contemplation of the Absolute. The very vagueness of the term has all the charm of mystery. There is a sense of abstract purity about it, a feeling as of rarefied mountain air, which, if it is difficult to breathe, is clear and refined and free from the dust and fog of earth. I must therefore return to the question, why should we identify the Absolute with the Divine? You take a supposed existence, strip off every rag and vestige of an attribute, and then call it "God." Why should this indescribable residuum, this naked entity, be any more divine than the Christian God who appears before us clad in all the glory of the most sublime attributes? Grant it that there is a difficulty with these attributes themselves, that they seem to introduce limitations, still, why should the absence of them confer Divinity? I can understand that they may be cited as notes of Divinity;

* "Microcosmus," Engl. Trans., vol. ii. p. 688.

but I cannot at all see how the denial of them, how any mere negation, can be so regarded.

If, however, you insist on calling your Absolute divine, then are you not conferring on it an attribute? You have robbed it of all specific attributes—power, wisdom, goodness, etc.; but you have compensated it for the loss of them by endowing it with the greatest and most comprehensive of conceivable attributes—the attribute of Divinity itself.

There is only one alternative, namely, to deny that Divinity is an attribute. Shall we accept the negation? Then the word has no meaning. In repeating it we are juggling with sounds; we are throwing dust in the eyes of the simple who imagine that if we open our lips we have some meaning to convey by what we utter.

While we are being driven to and fro between the words "absolute" and "infinite," it will be said that at least the Absolute is infinite, even if all attributes limit and imply finitude. But what is infinity *per se?* Either it is infinity in all respects, which is the carrying up of all qualities beyond any limitation, or it is the similar characteristic of

certain qualities. Infinity itself is a barren abstraction which cannot really exist till it is applied to some object or attribute. Even then there is no reason for calling it divine. Max Müller, in his "Hibbert Lectures," argued for theism on the ground that all thought, by its definitions cutting off the limited from what lies outside it, implied the infinite beyond. But if it does this, why should we call that infinite God? The simplest conception of such an infinity is the idea of infinite space. We cannot escape from this idea. Perhaps, as Kant argued, the reason is its being nothing but a form of our own thought. But we must think of it as real. We try to conceive of range and scope for all possible existences and movements stretching out and going on for ever, and still an unmeasurable range and scope spreading away beyond that awful vacancy —forever. But if this be the case, why should we call it God? I cannot bow down before space and worship it. Suppose the ether through which light waves play is infinite, shall I therefore bow down before the ether? It would be more sensible to lie prostrate before Nebuchadnezzar's golden image; for at least that would manifest

some form of Assyrian art, indicative of more or less thought and skill. I may yield to infinite power, stand amazed before infinite wisdom, shrink with awe from infinite holiness, or gaze with rapture and adoration on infinite love. Here I find Divinity. But I see no reason to worship bare Infinity or the bald Absolute; for there I discover nothing I can call divine.

X

These criticisms may be deemed beside the mark. It may be objected that I have only set up a man of straw, and that if he is demolished, the real Divinity of the Absolute is not touched. For, it may be said, the Absolute in itself, and prior to its evolution in the multitudinous universe, is not divine. It attains Divinity by this very process of evolution. Then we can only recognize its Divinity as that of the universe of separate, finite existences. What is this but Pantheism? So in spite of the mysterious adoration of the Absolute, it is not that, but Nature, which is really divine. Then we had better drop the idea of the Absolute, grandiose

though it be, and fall back on our old friend the pagan Pan, since it turns out that we can only predicate actualized Divinity of "the All," the sum of concrete existences. But Christianity is not naturalism. From first to last it raises our thoughts to higher aims than the adoration of things as they are in this present world of mind and matter. All that makes for the truth of Christianity contradicts any such conception of the Being of God.

On the other hand, when we think of God as "the Absolute," or rather drop the name of God as too limited and too personal, and think only of "the Absolute," we are not simply dealing with Pantheism, we have lost touch with Nature, the world, life, concrete things—the materials of Pantheism—and we have only an indescribable existence which is equivalent to non-existence.

To conclude, take the position either way. Suppose you think of the Absolute distributively as the sum of all existence, why should you call the sum of all existence God? What divine attribute has it? Is it adorable? Does it command reverent submission? Can it be trusted with implicit faith? In its vastness and mystery the universe is sublime,

and the contemplation of sublimity hushes us to a sense of awe. But that is not what we mean by the worship of God. Then let us go to the other extreme and try to face the idea of the Absolute in itself. Again I ask, why should you call *that* God? What reason is there for saying that when you have stripped all qualities off the bare existence that remains is God? What reason is there for giving this characterless existence the honours of religious homage? Even if it be an existence at all, the Divine Name is a misnomer for it, since no qualities of Divinity are attached to it, and a name is misplaced if that to which it is applied does not contain the qualities that it connotes.

No doubt among the devotees of the Absolute all this will seem very shallow and unphilosophical. The writer who takes this course must expect to be called a Philistine. That would be serious for him if he were aiming at winning the reputation of a philosopher. But if he has no such ambition, it really does not matter. John Stuart Mill, and more recently Professor William James, have argued in a similar way, and their aim was to establish their own systems of philosophy in place of that which they set

themselves to demolish. The aim of the present discussion is very much humbler. It is simply to repudiate the claim of a somewhat domineering idealism to interfere with a truth that has not come in the philosophical way at all, and that does not profess to found any philosophy. If, as I have tried to show, this system of the Absolute is too remote from the experiences of religion to be called religion, we may be free to go our way in the lowly paths of religious experience without much regard for its supernal abstractions. The clouds of speculation may float over our heads, unheeded, while we gather the flowers of spirituality that spring up at our feet. Not starting with any philosophical definition of God as the Infinite or the Absolute into which our religious ideas are to be fitted, we may be prepared to accept just such an idea of God as we receive in the revelation of Christ. And if it be asked why we use the name "God" for One whom we so conceive, our answer may be that this is the highest and best that our minds have yet been able to perceive, and to us the highest and best is the divinest and most adorable. To the Christian "the Infinite," or "the Absolute," if such a being can be

imagined at all, is not really so great, so divine, so adorable, as the personal Being whose character is love, and whose relation to us as our Father is made known by Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER VI

Immanence and Transcendence

I

AT the time when the Christian gospel was first preached by St. Paul in the Greek world the ideas of the immanence and the transcendence of God were each advocated in an extreme form by representative schools of theology. The Stoics made so much of the idea of God as the soul of the world as to carry the thought of immanence to the extent of Pantheism. The Epicureans, on the other hand, banished their otiose divinities to an inaccessible region, so that practically their position amounted to Atheism. At Athens the Apostle plainly leaned towards the former position, quoting a Stoic hymn and saying, concerning God, that "in Him we live and move and have our being;" although there was no trace of the Pantheism which

failed to distinguish between God and the world in his utterances. That St. Paul was true to the ideas of his Master in taking this line cannot be denied by anybody who enters into the spirit of the gospel teaching. It is, of course, apparent throughout that our Lord did not touch the philosophic problems of His age. The circle and atmosphere of His thought were Jewish, not Greek; and He was more concerned with revealing the truth of God than with expounding any theory of divinity. Still, the contrast between His position and that of the rabbis of His day is as striking in this direction as elsewhere. The later Judaism sought to honour the greatness of God by magnifying His transcendence. According to the teaching of the scribes a host of intermediary angels—all marshalled in their several spheres—came between the seventh heaven, where God dwelt, and the earth, where man lived, and it was only through their agency that God's will was carried out in these lower regions. In St. Paul's Epistles, and also in the Epistle to the Hebrews, we have traces of this angelology with reference to the creation of the universe, the giving of the law, and other actions originating in God, but executed by His

heaven-sent agents. Christ swept away this host of intermediaries. He did not deny the existence of angels or their ministering activity, but He virtually ignored them, and in His positive teaching He brought the thought of God close to us. His own healing is done "by the finger of God." Our Father cares for every detail of our lives. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without His notice. The very hairs of our head are numbered by Him. His watchful care is such that we need have no anxiety for the morrow. The beauty of the lilies and the provision of their food for the ravens are His work. Jesus says, "My Father worketh *hitherto*, and I work," a saying which implies the present activity of God Himself in the world.

But when we have given full weight to all that our Lord has said in this direction, I do not think that it amounts to an assertion of the immanence of God. We may say that it does not conflict with that idea, that it better agrees with such a conception than with the contemporary rabbinical notion of absolute transcendence; and yet both ideas are metaphysical, and there is no metaphysics in the teaching of Jesus Christ. This does

not mean that the whole discussion with reference to the immanence of God is alien to the spirit of Christianity. What it shows is that we cannot get an authoritative statement on the subject from the lips of our Lord. Therefore what we have to ask is whether the thought of God's immanence best agrees with Christ's teaching, whether it may be accepted as a correct interpretation of the ultimate Christian position—rather than the thought of His transcendence. The ordinary view in the present day is to accept both. But the question now at issue is, Where should the emphasis lie?

II

A great change came over the thought of Christendom with reference to this question during the course of the nineteenth century. Here I will quote what I said several years ago, because it was written with no reference to subsequent controversies—the "New Theology" having arisen since then.* "The eighteenth-century idea

* The sentences in quotation marks are taken from "A Century's Progress," which was first published in serial form in 1900.

of God was dominated by Deism, even in orthodox circles. God was thought of apart from the universe as seated in solitary glory, inhabiting some remote region called heaven, whence He issued mandates for the administration of His dominions. He was pictured as the Great Architect who had planned the order of the universe and then carried it out by a series of ingenious contrivances. This was at some definite period of time; and after the primary work of creation was completed, after that one busy week recorded in Genesis was over, God was supposed to have entered on His Age-long Sabbath rest, leaving the vast machine He had made to run by means of the initial force He had imparted to it, like a clock wound up and set going. . . . With this conception of God, and His manner of acting on the universe, it was inevitable that men's ideas of His relations with the human world should partake of an external character. It is true that among devout people a heartfelt faith in the Holy Spirit, which was revived in the Methodist and Evangelical movements, happily modified the feeling of Divine remoteness. Yet God was still thought of as dwelling in the heights above. The

personality of God was held in a very anthropomorphic way. . . . A great change has come over us in regard to this whole subject. In place of the Divine transcendence of a hundred years ago we have come to believe in the immanence of God. We think of Him not only as formally omnipresent, but as living in the midst of His creatures, nay, as living in them, the very source and spring of their life and activity. We do not conceive that He created the universe at some distant point of time and then left it in the main to its own resources; we rather maintain that He is the ever-present, living, acting centre and fountain of all life and being. The danger is that this should drift into Pantheism, that the thought of the Divine Personality should merge in the idea of immanence, that the awe of God's majesty should decline before the sense of His nearness, that human responsibility and the sense of sin should fade before the all-embracing idea of God's action within as well as around us. But the immanence of God is not Pantheism; it does not deny the real personality of God; it does not exclude the will-power of man and his consequent responsibility. It is an

addition to, not a substitute for, the personal conception of God; and difficult as the explanation may be, it does not, because it cannot, set aside our inner consciousness of will, obligation, duty, and guilt." *

According to this idea of God's immanence, we think of Him as dwelling in the world, in Nature, in the soul, instead of entertaining the notion of a celestial court where He sits enthroned, and whence He sends out His emissaries. This, however, is but the simplest, most elementary conception; it merely gives us spacial immanence. Less than this is not compatible with the divine omnipresence, an attribute of God which is admitted into all Christian systems of theology. All educated Christian people are ready to admit that the imagery of the throne above the heavens is imagery and nothing else. The thought of a localized God is pagan. It suits the Olympian gods and goddesses, not the infinitely higher and more spiritual idea which Christ has set before us. The hundred and thirty-ninth Psalm showed us a Jew of the Old Covenant rising above that narrow notion. It finds no place whatever in the New Testament.

* *Ibid.*, pp. 95–98.

But if God is everywhere, He must be in all things. If He is independent of space altogether, He cannot be excluded from anything by spacial or material boundaries.

III

But we have travelled a very little way towards the essential idea of the immanence of God when we have only emancipated the conception of the Divine from limitations of space, when we have merely asserted His omnipresence, when perhaps we have adopted the inconceivable definition that "God is a circle whose centre is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere." We must proceed to more intimate and lucid ideas. There is a tendency among some disciples of the doctrine of immanence to become incoherently dithyrambic. Poetic elation will not justify any very positive inferences; and yet most important inferences are drawn from the conception of immanence. Therefore we must examine it more closely. First, we will look at its positive characteristics and the different degrees of intimacy with which it may be pressed home into the very texture and fabric of the world. Then

we will try to see what limits are imposed upon it by the Christian revelation in regard to God and man and the universe.

When we begin to work out the idea of the immanence of God in relation to the world, we see that we must give up the theory of an automaton, a clock wound up long ago and set going by itself. God is present in Nature, and all natural forces depend on Him for their action every moment in every minutest application of them. Applying this thought to creation, we think of that as only the beginning of some new mode of divine activity that goes on as long as the created things have their being. The idea fits in most aptly with the doctrine of evolution, according to which creation did not consist in the production of finished worlds and orders of life by sudden fiats and tremendous shocks. It is a gradual process of development from the simplest beginnings, and God is in it at every stage. When we apply this idea to the reign of law in Nature, we find that expressing, as Charles Kingsley says, the constancy of God. Natural processes are uniform because the God of Nature is not fickle. His consistency is reflected in Nature's regularity.

On the theory of transcendence, God could only appear at the beginning as the legislator, or, in the subsequent stages, by means of miracles, which were regarded as interferences with the course of Nature. During the Middle Ages, when miracles were supposed to be everyday occurrences, at all events wherever a saint was to be found, this did not much matter. But the rigorous science of our own age has raised such strong barriers against the invasion of modern miracles that any approach of the Divine in this direction has become less and less conceivable. The result is the Godless universe of a Haeckel. But what has been lost in the disappearance of miracle is recovered in the divinity of law. With the thought of the immanence of God in mind, we have not to wait for God's action through weary stretches of the divine inactivity, like the impotent folk at the Pool of Bethesda. Angel or no angel to disturb the waters, faith in God sees health and all other blessings coming from Him by every conceivable natural channel. Nature is no longer only visited by God where the setting sun, below the horizon on the plain of everyday life, touches here and there a few rare mountain

peaks; she is flooded with a divine glory as under noonday radiance.

IV

Nevertheless, this conception of the presence of God in Nature does not forbid us to believe in well-authenticated marvels which are known as miracles. Christ Himself is the greatest of miracles; the resurrection of Christ is the best attested of miracles. With the wonder of His Person and His victory through death before us, we should not find it so difficult to believe that He could do those lesser wonders that are recorded of Him in the Gospels. We need not call them breaches of the laws of Nature, since they are so far beyond our experience that we cannot say how they stand in regard to Nature. But, on the other hand, we have no reason to suppose that we shall ever be able to account for them by reference to any laws of our own sphere of life. They are performed by a Being who comes to us from a higher sphere, and is in possession of the powers peculiar to that sphere. There is no more breach of natural law in this than there is when in the lower

sphere of our experience, which is higher than that of the material world, we use our brain-power to manipulate Nature, so that the natural elasticity of steam drives our engines. We may think of Christ as standing as far above us as we are above Nature. If so, the superiority of His spiritual power over our lower sphere will be no less than the superiority of our intellectual contrivance over blind physical forces. With this view the miraculous is no more divine than the natural, not because it is brought down to the level of Nature or science, but because God is as much in the normal as in the abnormal. It is as much God's marvellous energy that makes the corn grow in the field as it is His own power in Christ that heals a leper and gives sight to a blind man. But in the one case the process belongs to the sphere of the laws among which we habitually move, while in the other new powers come in from a higher sphere.

We may apply the same principle to our conception of providence. Under the old theory of transcendence, while the general providence of God was easily admitted as part of the scheme of creation, it was more difficult to find a place for any

special providence. According to Leibnitz's theory of pre-established harmony, all was arranged from the first by such a supernal act of divine wisdom and forethought that the separate working of each individual monad would fall just into its right place, and so the total operations of all together would ultimately issue in the best of all possible worlds. But less daring thinkers tried to find room for exceptional instances of God's interference on special occasions. Thus, while thousands of people were drowned in shipwrecks every year, now and then and here and there some solitary individual would be quite exceptionally favoured by a providentially managed escape. This theory lay open to two objections. It did not show how there could be any difference between a special providence and a miracle; and it implied a divine favouritism inconsistent with that universal love for His children and watchful care over them that God is declared to have by the teaching of Christ.

V

Seeing these difficulties many people in the present day have given up all belief in

any connection of providence with individual persons and separate events, and have been satisfied to fall back on the idea of a general providential arrangement running through the laws and constitution of Nature in accordance with which, on the whole, things are working for good. The ship is making for port right enough, although there are sick women and crying children and passengers in all degrees of misery on board.

It must be admitted that this is a drab picture of Providence. Are we driven to it by our belief in the uniformity of natural law? That belief may compel us to give up hope for special providences; but it need not lead us to abandon faith in particular providences. We cannot believe that God's providence is only concerned with the one favourite in a hundred, while the ninety-nine, passed over with indifference, are left to howl unheeded in their misery. We must believe that God, who is the Father of all, cares for all His children; and, if we can think of Him as immanent in the world, we can believe in His care extending to each one of His children at every moment of their lives, so that the whole process is continuously carried on with

a minute consideration of what is right and fitting for every one. The thought is bewildering, almost inconceivable. Yet it is difficult to perceive any divine providence at all if we stop short of this. Undoubtedly the thought of the immanence of God is more helpful to such a belief than the notion of His transcendence.

VI

Coming nearer home, and entering the sphere of human life and thought, we approach the idea of the immanence of God in man, of the presence of the Divine Spirit working in the inner consciousness, or perhaps below the surface of the consciousness, of the human spirit. This is a subject which will come before us again when we are considering the Christian conception of the Holy Spirit. Apart from that definite conception there are some points of importance that call for attention at the present stage of our inquiry.

First, there is the idea of inspiration. The rabbinical notion, repeated in Mohammedan teaching, reduces the Scripture writer

to a mere tool in the hands of God. According to this doctrine God simply dictates the words of Scripture, and the "sacred penman" has nothing to do but set down what he has been told on his parchment or—in the case of Mohammed—his mutton bone. The whole trend of recent Biblical studies has undermined that artificial notion of inspiration. We know that the several writers exercised their own minds and expressed their own feelings in what they wrote. Now it is more usual to speak of the inspiration of the men than of the inspiration of the Book; or if we say that the Bible is an inspired Book, this is because it has been written by inspired men. Nor do we think of their inspiration as at all like that with which the priestess of Apollo was credited, an uncontrollable ecstasy or rapture. We rather think of the inspired prophet as a man whose intelligence has been quickened, not crushed, by the influence of the Spirit of God on him, while he is thereby gifted to see truths which otherwise would have been beyond his reach.

Then the idea of inspiration has enlarged its range. We are told that there is no essential difference between revelation and discovery. If that meant that revelation

was only another name for discovery, it might seem that all faith in divine inspiration had been abandoned. But we may turn the statement round and say that all discovery of new truth is revelation, that not only Isaiah and St. Paul, and their companions in the Scriptures, but Copernicus and Newton and Darwin were favoured with revelations. According to this view, revelation is the divine act of making truth known, and inspiration is the means by which this is effected. God's indwelling Presence opens the eyes to see what was there before unperceived. If we grant this, however, we cannot put the Bible on a level with Newton's "Principia" or Darwin's "Origin of Species." There is truth and truth, and some truth is higher and greater than other truth, and the vision that perceives it is more purified and God-like. The highest truth is spiritual truth, and the people who are gifted to see this stand first in the ranks of the divinely illuminated. More than that: it is not a mere question of gradation. Truth concerning the eternal things is so immensely important, and the perception of it is so supremely dependent on divine influences, that this must be set

apart and its inspired prophets be regarded by themselves as altogether exceptionally endowed. The immanence of God in all discovery does not destroy the uniqueness of the Christian revelation, any more than the fact of sunlight being essentially the same as glowworm light destroys the difference between day and night.

It is a step further in the same direction to say that all working of mind is rendered possible by the indwelling Presence of God. As early as the second century of the Christian Era Justin Martyr appropriated the Stoic doctrine of the *Logos Spermaticos* to Christianity. He held that the divine Word and Reason was distributed among all intelligent beings in seed form, that all true thinking came from seeds of the Logos. Clement of Alexandria applied the same idea more fully to classical literature and philosophy. There were other teachers in the Church who taught that the soul of man was a spark from the Divine. If this could be applied to the knowledge of truth, still more might it interpret the impulses for righteousness, the strivings after a better life which characterize the spiritual nature of man. Conscience is often regarded as

the voice of God in the soul. That is in the region of the ethical. Spiritual instincts move us in deeper regions even than the ethical, and there the Divine seems to be most closely in contact with the human. This is expressed by Wordsworth, where he speaks of—

> "The voice of Deity, on height and plain,
> Whispering those truths in stillness, which the WORD
> To the four quarters of the winds proclaims."

VII

While reflections such as these may not be derived directly from the revelation of God in Christ or based on the New Testament writings, it is not by accident that they have been developed in the Christian atmosphere and have found a home in the Christian Church. Their origin may be traced to meditations on God and Nature, to metaphysical speculations, to spiritual experiences. But they are fully in accord with the fundamental Christian revelation of God as Love.

VIII

In the next place we have to face the question of the limits of the immanence of God. When we look at this truth by itself it may seem to be all-pervading. The wonderful Presence seems to fill earth and heaven, to permeate all life, to penetrate all thought. This, however, is very different from Pantheism, which identifies God with Nature. The very language employed in describing the immanence of God should lead us to see the vast difference between this conception and Pantheism. To be in anything is not to be that thing. The water that is in a cup is not the cup. Even when the cup is full to the brim, what it contains is one thing, and the cup itself is another. Immanence cannot mean identity. When you affirm identity you deny immanence. Pantheism is a negation of the idea of the immanence of God.

We may be pulled up at this stage with a warning against merely verbal reasoning. It may be said that while God is the only real existence there is undoubtedly the appearance of individuality in external things. Or it may be argued that God is the source

of all, although the lower and more external may be in some way—if only in thought or phenomenally—distinguished from Him. Then all that really counts will be God and God's action. This idea may be illustrated by the couplet from Pope—

> "All things are parts of one stupendous whole,
> Whose body Nature is, and God the soul."

This may be regarded as a statement of the doctrine of immanence. As the soul is in the body, so God is in Nature. But the soul rules, moves, employs the body for its own use. So God is thought of as thinking all the thoughts, ruling, influencing, performing all the actions of the universe, not only physical, but also human, so that all our thoughts are only God thinking in us, all our deeds are only God's actions wrought through us. Stated thus, as I have said, we have a conception of immanence which is practically indistinguishable from Pantheism. The inert substance of Nature on which God works counts for nothing by itself; the only things of importance are the thought and action, and these are ascribed to God. Even this is not enough. The old notion of inert matter plastic in the hand of the

Architect of the universe has been abandoned. We do not know what matter is, nor even that it exists at all apart from its operations. But according to this theory, all its operations, in common with all else that happens, spring from the direct thought and action of God. Therefore God's thought and action are all that we know; the rest may be, as the Indian philosophy teaches, mere illusion. Then, although we may talk about the immanence of God manifested by His thought and action in the universe, what we really have is the Pantheistic conception according to which God Himself is the All of which anything can be affirmed; and therefore conversely the All is God.

It should not be difficult to show that this is not the Christian conception of God. To meet the requirements of the truth that comes to us from Christ and through Christian experience there must be some limits to this idea of Divine immanence. Those limits are of two kinds. One kind of limitation must be affirmed in the region of human experience; the other concerns the Being of God.

IX

We will begin with the limits on the human side. Now, there are several aspects of what we may call the natural and human limits to the conception of immanence. Let us look at two or three of them.

First, there is the consciousness of free will. No sooner have I stated this than I perceive an appalling abyss of controversy opening at our feet. Unless we are to plunge into this abyss—and it is far from my intention to do so—we must find some firm ground by the side of it. That will be a dogmatic position, and we must be dogmatic on nine points out of ten while we are arguing the tenth or we shall not be able to have any ground to start from. It is not our present business to discuss free will. What I would say about it is, that there is an almost universal and ineradicable conviction of it in the minds of men. Even those people who deny it in theory act upon it in practice. You may say that it is an illusion; meanwhile at every step you assume it to be a reality. The apostles of the Absolute assure us that it must be an

illusion because it conflicts with their sublime theory. But if it does so, why should free will go and the Absolute remain? Have we not at least as good reason for believing in free will as we have for believing in the Absolute? As the case presents itself to my own mind, we have much more reason for the former assurance than we have for the latter. But if we admit the possibility of free will in individual human experience, we say that there is a certain sphere of influence which God does not dominate. It might almost be asserted that He respects the independence of the beings whom He has created in His own image. If you like you may save your notion of omnipotence by saying that at any moment God could make us do whatever He chose; but that could only be by withdrawing His gift of free will or crushing it out of existence. It would be sheer contradiction to say that we have free will and that still our every action is performed by God. We can only believe that if God allows us any range of freedom, however limited, He does in a measure stand out of it, does limit His own immanence to this extent that He refrains from acting.

Secondly, we feel the sense of moral obligation. This is the foundation of Kant's argument for free will in the region of the practical reason. "I ought—therefore I can." Now, this overawing sense of moral obligation, this idea of duty, which Wordsworth addresses as the "stern daughter of the voice of God," comes to us as an urgency from without. It is true that we hear it as an inner voice, that it speaks through our own conscience, that no external authority, however august, has such commanding right over us as this demand of conscience in our own breasts. Yet even while it is warning or urging us within, we recognize it as an authority over us claiming to curb or rouse what we cannot but feel to be more intimate to our own personality—our desire, our feeling, our aim or purpose. But just in so far as we recognize this voice of God in duty as coming to us to bind us to a certain course, we must acknowledge our own separateness from it, and power to obey or disobey it. This thought, then, brings us back to the subject of the previous paragraph—to the idea of free will.

Thirdly, we have a consciousness of guilt. The remarkable fact about the sense of sin

is, that it is deepened just in proportion to the development of spirituality. The shallow, slumbrous soul scarcely feels it; but it grows on an awakened spiritual nature with ever keener pain and shame. It is the saint who smites his breast like the publican, and cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Thomas à Kempis mourns over his sins as Cæsar Borgia would never dream of mourning over his own unspeakably blacker deeds of wickedness. Nor is this to be brushed aside as the product of morbid sensitiveness. It is too general, too widespread. It is not confined to sick souls, except in so far as their sickness is moral and spiritual, the sickness of sin itself. But this feeling of guilt, which grows with the advance of the spiritual nature, would be meaningless if it did not imply a recognition of alienation from God and of an offence against His holy will. Such a feeling may be aroused by the touch of the immanent God, but it is a witness to something beyond that immanence, to the independence of the soul that has been able to contract the guilt. The stain would be no stain if it were a normal development. The scared sheep lost in the wilderness must have broken out of the fold, or it

would not be in such a plight. The awful state of so much of the world weltering in sin and misery and ruin is the glaring proof that there are tremendous facts in human life and history outside the range of the Divine immanence.

X

And now let us turn to the other branch of the subject, where the limits of the immanence of God are seen in relation to His own Being. Here, again, we are confronted on the threshold with bold assumptions springing from the imposing idea of the Absolute. It is said that the Absolute is the sum of all being regarded as a unity. The One is identical with the many. To our observation the world appears broken, confused, multitudinous; but to Him, the Absolute, or rather to It, if personality is denied, it is one, and that one is all. We are continually brought round to this tremendous metaphysical postulate. If we grant it, there is an end of all argument, and, as we have seen, an end of the idea of immanence itself. It does not agree with the Christian conception

of God as the Father, of whom all souls are the children, and therefore beings in some way distinct from Him. Nor, as it seems to me, can it justify itself over against that idea. The question, however, must be left to the philosophers to fight out on the vast battle-ground where they have scope to marshal their metaphysical arguments. Meanwhile, what we have to see from the specifically Christian standpoint is that God must be much more than immanent. Obviously He must be much more than immanent in a single individual. Otherwise we should limit the idea of God to that individual's personal consciousness. Now, if He is immanent in two individuals, say Peter and Paul, in so far as He is immanent in Peter He is transcendent to Paul; and *vice versâ*, in so far as He is immanent in Paul He is transcendent to Peter. Seeing that there are hundreds of millions of people in the world, His immanence in each individual man or woman is infinitesimal compared to His transcendence, even when He is only thought of as immanent in the race. But if there are other worlds than ours His immanence in all of them is transcendent to our human experience.

This brings us but a little way. If God is immanent in the whole universe, and only so immanent, He is still belittled far below the Christian conception of His nature. If He is the Creator He must precede and stand above and dominate what He creates. Yet Christianity shares the universal Biblical conception of God as the Maker of all things. This conception is not vitally affected by the doctrine of evolution. We abandon the physical in favour of the biological idea of the universe. But in either case the thought realized in it, and the will producing it, are independent of what they issue in. A God who is not so independent is not what the Christian means by the name God. A sum and concentration of the life and consciousness of the universe is its consequence, its result, its product; not its cause. Even if we had reason to believe that this was the final issue of all things, we should have no excuse to name it God. But I am wandering into forbidden paths with these reflections on the subject of natural theology. Apart from them the idea of God as supreme, the Lord over all, the Father of His family, is essential to the New Testament as well as to the Old Testament idea of God. It was

evolved in the older revelation. It is assumed in the newer revelation. Any way of regarding the immanence of God which excluded it would be foreign to Christ's revelation of the Father. While Christianity assures us of the nearness of God, and even of His indwelling, it also most emphatically declares His supremacy. If Christ is to be our guide —and our subject is the Christian conception of God—we may say that the immanence of God cannot be accepted exclusively, cannot be dwelt upon as giving us the whole truth, to the exclusion of His transcendent supremacy.

These considerations would carry more weight if we were brought to dwell more reverently on the thought of the holiness of God than is customary in the present day. We have abandoned the older Jewish notion of holiness as representing the seclusion and dignity of a court except as that may illustrate the spiritual aloofness of God, His separation from all evil, His spotless purity. His immanence in a sinful world does not contradict the holiness of His separation from sin. It illustrates the perfection of His love; it is the work of love to stoop to the lowest in pitying, saving grace. That idea

will give to the very conception of immanence so regarded a proof of transcendence. It is just because God is transcendently good that He has shown Himself immanently gracious.

With such thoughts in our minds it becomes a question whether after all the expression, "the immanence of God," is the best indication of the truth of the case, and whether instead of speaking of God being immanent in us it would not be more correct to say that we are immanent in God. This statement of the situation corresponds to St. Paul's words on the Areopagus—"in Him we live and move and have our being." Plotinus, the Neoplatonist, is commonly regarded as the philosopher of immanence *par excellence;* yet even Plotinus spoke of the world being in God "as a net is in the sea." We float in the infinite ocean of God's Being, closely encircled by His existence on all sides, uplifted and borne along by the mighty current of His life, penetrated and saturated with his influence, if awed by His holiness yet embraced by His love, with some freedom left to ourselves, since, after all, we are more than drifting nets, but still slight and frail and very small compared

with that Mighty Being whose impenetrable mysteries stretch out on all sides far beyond the range of our sight and imagination and wildest dreams.

CHAPTER VII

The Incarnation

I

THE fact of the Incarnation is the foundation of the Christian faith. At the base and centre and heart of it stands the amazing truth that God has appeared on earth in a human life, looking at us through a man's eyes, laying a brother's hand upon us. The whole gospel rests on this central verity. Yet this central verity is a profound mystery. The more persistently we try to explain it, the more hopelessly do we lose ourselves among conflicting ideas. Church councils have affirmed it authoritatively; but that could only be for those who accepted their authority. Creeds have defined it skilfully; but definition is not explanation, much less is it confirmation. It is significant that from primitive Apostolic times, through

all the ages right down to our own day, the vast majority of Christians of nearly all Churches and schools of thought have accepted it in some form. While the many are often in error, and truth is not seldom with the few, this is not in itself a proof of the doctrine. On the other hand, the fruitfulness of Christianity is the strongest argument for the soundness of its root.

When we have admitted this we are still pressed with further questions. First, have we any specific evidence for the Incarnation? Behind that lies the question, what do we mean by the Incarnation? More particularly, as more germane to our present subject, we have the question, how does the doctrine of the Incarnation stand related to our conception of God Himself? Lastly, there are the positive difficulties in the way of accepting this idea. We will take up each of these points, but the first two very briefly, because they fall to be discussed with reference to the doctrine of the nature of Christ rather than in dealing with the Christian conception of God, which is our present business.

II

The idea of the Incarnation involves the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ in conjunction with that of His humanity. In quite early times it was as necessary to establish the second of these two factors of the Incarnation as the first. Almost the earliest of the heresies, appearing, perhaps, before the close of the first century of the Christian Era, was *Docetism*, the denial of the actual humanity of Christ, and especially the denial of the reality of His body, in place of which it was supposed that He had only a phantom appearance. This remarkable fact is a powerful witness to the strong hold that our Lord's Divinity had taken on His immediate followers. So dazzled were some of them by the heavenly radiance that they could not believe in the earthly nature associated with it. If it was not possible to think of the same person as possessing the two natures, it was the human that must go, not the Divine.

That primitive heresy has been long dead; though only in its crude and obvious original form. All down the ages there has been a tendency in the Church to swallow up and

bury out of sight the limitations of the human life in the immensity and grandeur of the Divine. But this tendency is less apparent to-day than ever it was. One of the happiest products of recent theological thought has been its recovery of the genuine humanity of Jesus. Never before has so much attention been given to the facts of His earthly life, or such daring attempts made to interpret the development and history of His human consciousness. Therefore there is no longer any need to labour at the proof of this aspect of the Incarnation. It may be taken for granted. All the questioning and speculation turn on the interpretation of the other side—the reality of the Divinity of Christ, the nature of this fact, and its relation to His humanity.

III

It has been customary to attempt to demonstrate the truth of the Divinity of Christ in the first instance by appeals to Scripture. There are certain proof texts which have been brought forward again and again from quite primitive patristic times.

Some of these are found in the Old Testament, as, for instance, the prophetic utterance in Isa. ix. 6, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." While scientific methods of exegesis have discounted the value of some of these Biblical passages as witnesses to the Divinity of Christ, quite enough remain for us to be able to assert without hesitation that it is a Biblical doctrine, or, to be more precise, that, at least, it is distinctly and fully set forth in the New Testament. The old controversy of the orthodox with the Unitarians on Biblical grounds has come to an end. It has issued in victory to the orthodox. Nobody can now maintain that throughout the New Testament, in Paul and John as well as in the synoptic writers, Jesus appears as a "mere man."

Unfortunately, however, no sooner is this exegetical conclusion demonstrated than attempts are made to destroy its value by the denial of the authority of Scripture. When we have won our ground we find it slipping away beneath our feet, as though it

had been undermined by some hidden stream of doubt. Seemingly the rock that we had fought so hard to reach turns out to be quicksand. Then it is to little purpose that we have established our doctrine on Scripture, Scripture itself being represented to us as no sure basis of knowledge.

For those who still accept the authority of Scripture the case is settled. Plainly the Bible teaches the Divinity of Christ. I should be wasting ink and paper if I began to argue the point. But what is the value of this fact for those who are not convinced of the unquestionable authority of Scripture? Must we vindicate that authority before we can establish the truth of the Divinity of Christ? Such a requirement opens up to us a dreary vista of argumentation.

But now I think we can discover a more excellent way. The Bible itself does not fail in its value as a witness until we have determined the measure and weight of its inspiration. At least it is a storehouse of information on the ideas and beliefs of its writers. It is no small thing that the New Testament is literally saturated with faith in the Divinity of Christ. Paul says more than James, John is more explicit on the

subject than Mark. Still the fact remains that the first disciples of Christ and the earliest authors of Christian writings were virtually one and all convinced that Jesus was the Son of God, worthy of divine honours and of the trust and loyalty which only a divine nature could justify. This is a historical, fact, the significance of which lies in its proof of the amazing impression that Jesus had made on those who knew Him best.

IV

To this we must add our Lord's own self-witnessing, His unique life, His consciousness of union with God, His absolute serenity of conscience and assurance of sinlessness, the tremendous claims of authority in teaching and leadership that He put forth, side by side with His "sweet reasonableness," His utter unselfishness, the gentleness and lowliness of His spirit, His entire freedom from personal ambition.

Had the gospel portrait of Christ stood alone it would have spoken for the divine glory of the wonderful life therein described. But we have the sequel. First we have the

resurrection of Christ—one of the best attested facts of history. Then we have the work of Christ all down the ages. He declared that He came to give His life a ransom for many. The truth of this assertion has been amply verified by the results of His life and death and resurrection. Around the cross of Christ there has grown up the kingdom of heaven as a new order of life among men. From the grain of corn seemingly perishing in the tragedy of Calvary has come a harvest of richest fruitfulness for the redemption of man. Here is ample confirmation of the unique claims of Christ and the corresponding faith of His followers. By His work in the world He has proved to be what He claimed and they believed. It is the religion of a divine Christ that is redeeming the world. It is faith in the Incarnation that has led Christians to trust and follow and serve Christ. If that idea is not true the continuous and ever-extending redemption of man is based on one huge delusion. No doubt many a delusion has had wide influence over its victims. But no delusion has evinced worldwide redemptive power.

This, however, is not a point on which to

dwell just now. I have said so much simply to indicate why I take it for granted as of the essence of Christianity. Now let us proceed to the more specific questions that directly concern the subject of our present inquiry.

We have to ask what we mean by the idea of the Incarnation, especially as we consider it in relation to our conception of God. It is not enough to say that God is in Christ, because if we believe in the immanence of God we must hold that God is in every man, and, indeed, in everything—in the deer that bounds over the plain and also in the panther that hunts it; in the meanest flower that blows; in every stock and stone. We are sometimes told that God is in us potentially as He is in Christ actually, that therefore we are all potential Christs, and indeed, as some have asserted, that we might become actual Christs *if we would.* That there is a measure of truth in these daring assertions will not be hastily denied by those of us who have meditated long and deeply on our Lord's teachings about our union with Him and His union with the Father. It is even conceivable that the all-essential condition, "if we would," is most

clearly indicative of the difference between us and our Lord. But then there is a world of difference indicated by it. It may be that it is just through the will that the human in Christ is united to the divine. His will is absolutely harmonious with the Father's will. Is that the chief sign of the Incarnation? Does all the rest converge to it? Does He think God's thoughts, and feel God's feelings, and live God's life among men because first of all He wills God's will?

V

If we answered these questions in the affirmative we should not be falling back on the old Adoptionist notion, as some might suppose; for according to that notion Christ by self-discipline and toil and effort of soul ultimately attained to such perfect obedience to the divine will that God adopted Him as a reward, or at least as a consequence. But the supposition I am putting forward for the moment is that from the very first our Lord lived in perfect volitional union with God; that there was no question of toiling to attain; that the divine harmony existed all along and only needed to be developed.

This view does not dispense with the reality of the temptation and its consequent conflict. The temptation would be a subtle urging to abandon a position already held, not an attempt to hinder the attainment of a new position. The result of victory over temptation would develop the union of will with God in the human consciousness of Jesus, and strengthen it as the vigour of the oak is strengthened by battling with the gale. But just as the oak was a true oak even when it was but a slender sapling, so Christ's will was one with His Father's will from the first dawn of consciousness.

I do not offer this idea as an explanation of the mystery of the Incarnation. I believe that mystery to be much deeper; for we still have no exposition of the reason for this unique harmony of wills from the very first. To my own mind the only conceivable way of accounting for that unique harmony is by believing in a union of natures beneath and within it; so that Christ's will agrees with His Father's will because His nature is united to His Father's nature. This points to an actual fact of Incarnation.

But allowing some such view to be correct, we may still believe that the point of contact

between the two natures in Christ lies more especially in the will. That it is not so with ourselves we must all admit. To say that it might be so *if we would* is to beg the question, for the very fact of difference is that Christ's will agrees with God's will, while our will does not.

These considerations have sprung out of a digression on the difference between Christ and ourselves; but if we look at them in another way they may help us with the question now before us—what we understand the idea of the Incarnation to involve. Clearly it implies some sort of intimate union of the divine with the human in the Person of Christ. The suppositious middle course of Arianism is really no middle course at all. Athanasius and the Cappadocian theologians of the fourth century came off triumphant on this point. To imagine Christ to be a created Being distinct from God, yet not a man, but a sort of very superior archangel, is only to plunge the question into greater confusion than ever. This is not an idea seriously advocated by any important theological school in the present day. The Incarnation must be the actual union of God Himself with man in the Person of

Christ. If we cannot receive that idea in any form, we have only the Unitarian alternative, we can only think of Christ as a man among men, though it may be allowed the crown and flower of humanity, endowed with the most wonderful spiritual graces.

VI

Further, when we think of the Incarnation we cannot represent this as the dwelling of God in a human life, in closest, most intimate union, but still leaving the human personality distinct from the divine. Jesus Christ is one historic Person, and the divine nature must belong to the personality of Him as truly as the human, if we are to think of Him as an incarnation of God. We cannot understand how this came to be. But we cannot understand the mystery of our own personality. Is it, then, surprising that the unique personality of Christ should baffle our curiosity? Having abundant evidence for both factors—for the humanity of Christ and also for His Divinity, while it cannot be denied that He is one Person as truly as any one of us is one person—all we may be called upon to do is to see that this

does not conflict with other known truths or involve us in actual contradictions. We may admit truths that we cannot explain. But we cannot believe in a certain contradiction. That would be nonsense.

Now, profoundly difficult as all efforts to penetrate this mystery must be, there are considerations brought before us by modern psychology which help rather than hinder our perception of the essential fact of the Incarnation—the union of the divine and the human in Christ. Personality is now seen to be not the simple entity that it was formerly believed to consist in. An individual personality appears to be built up out of many complex elements. It has attained to unity by the fusion of them and apparently by the emerging of a dominant self-consciousness and will. It is possible to spilt up the complex personality into some of its constituent elements. This appears to have happened in certain morbid mental conditions, which have given rise, in waking and in somnambulistic states, in normal and in hypnotic conditions, to all the phenomena of two or more personalities in the same man or woman. It seems possible to have the consciousness temporarily elevated to a

higher plane or depressed to a lower plane. In one condition the patient is gentle, open-hearted, generous, amiable; in another he is suspicious, morose, selfish, harsh.

Then the phenomena of subconscious mental states point to an even greater marvel of personality. It may well be that the stream of consciousness on the surface of our personality, in the full daylight, recognized, studied, directed, remembered, flows over silent depths of soul-life out of which emerge now and again strange ideas, perhaps memories long forgotten, because sunk beneath the surface, but not destroyed; or possibly new thoughts borne in upon us in these mysterious regions from other spheres. With such phenomena of the normal human mind now brought to our notice, is it so difficult to believe that in the unique Person of Christ the divine comes into contact with the human and interfuses with it in the abysmal depths of His Being?

VII

This very idea, however, raises again the point touched upon in the earlier part of the present chapter. The doctrine of the

immanence of God may help us to conceive of the Divine Presence in Christ, but does it not grant this at the expense of His uniqueness? If God is immanent in all life, what have we to say that is distinctive of His indwelling in Christ? What is the difference between immanence and incarnation? Is it only a difference of degree, of operative activity, of emphatic manifestation? Are we to say that while the divine is partially present and influential in us, it is fully present and wholly dominant in Jesus? that while it is more or less latent or dormant in commonplace human lives, it is fully manifested because absolutely supreme and all pervading in His life? Such a difference of degrees of immanence might be so great as to appear as a difference of kind, and yet there might be more and more close approaches to it as men and women became fuller and yet fuller of the consciousness of God and yielded with deeper and yet deeper submission to His supreme will.

It must be admitted that this is not the New Testament presentation of the case. There we read of a great act of God in sending His Son into the world, and a great

condescension on the part of His Son in stooping to the level of our human life. The immanence conception of the Incarnation leaves the centre of the personality of Christ wholly in His human nature. At the last analysis He appears simply as a man entirely under the influence of God. In other words, this is not incarnation at all, it is inspiration.

Now we have seen that the historical evidence confirms the Scripture teaching of the personal Divinity of Christ, of the Divinity of His very nature and Being, indicating that in His very self He is as truly of the nature of God as He is of the nature of man. Even if we find that all attempts at an explanation of the fact fail us, that does not dispose of the clear evidence we possess that it is a fact.

On the theory of Determinism we should be brought up against a hopeless paradox at this point. Accordingly, many of those who think they see the whole secret of the Incarnation in the idea of the immanence of God are also champions of the Determinist theory of the human will. If all our wills are absolutely fixed by the constitution of the universe, and are only

phases of the universal will which is the will of God, there is nothing left for a more intimate relation between the divine and the human in the Person of Christ. But if personality resides especially in volitional individuality—and in us that is not identical with the will of God, while in Christ it is identical with the will of God—we see a vital and essential difference between Him and us. I must here repeat what I pointed out earlier. I do not merely mean that Jesus lived so perfectly good a life that He brought His will at every moment into harmony with the will of God. That comes near the Adoptionist view of some of the early Christians, and also that of Arius. We have to account for this perfect harmony of wills; and—as I have already said—the explanation offered by the Incarnation is that it resulted from a blending of the two natures in one personality. There is no such blending in the case of any of us. The saintly soul may be saturated with the influence of God, and yet at the centre its free will remains a purely human will.

Again, it must be repeated this is not an explanation. But it appears to me to

be a statement of the facts to which the evidence points. Any theory which contradicts or ignores those facts cannot be the right explanation of them.

VIII

From another point of view the idea of the Incarnation has seemed to many impossible, even inconceivable. We may think of the Olympian gods and goddesses, who are little more than magnified men, descending to earth in human form and holding familiar intercourse with mortals. But how utterly different is the thought of the Maker of heaven and earth, the Almighty God to whom "the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance," entering the world by the humble gate of birth and helpless infancy, and living the limited life of a man! Can God indeed share the very being of One who worked as a carpenter in a village workshop, sat weary by Jacob's well, died in agony on the cross? To the Galilean peasants the world was a very small place; but the telescope and the microscope have given us some perception of its awful

vastness. In our imaginations, at all events, this has tended to make the idea of a local, temporal incarnation much more difficult.

On the other hand, we should not let physical immensity enter into our consideration of the case. There is a sense in which we may say that one spark of intellect is greater than a whole solar system of dead matter. Sir Alfred Wallace has written a book to show—as he thinks—that in all probability man is the highest creature in the known universe. To many of us it is difficult to believe that the immeasurable reaches of the starry heavens are all destitute of soul life, are all morally and intellectually desert. Nor does it seem unreasonable to suppose that there may be intelligences and spiritual natures as high above the human as we are above the animal. The selection of our little earth, one of the smaller planets of one of the smaller suns in rather a corner of the known universe, for the great act of the Incarnation of the God of All has been regarded as absurdly improbable. The notion, we are told, is born of our ignorance, the dulness of our imaginations, or our insufferable self-conceit.

One way of meeting the objection thus

presented to us is to suggest that our world may be the only fallen world among all the many spheres of creation. Then God in His infinite compassion for those of His creatures who are in the worst plight stoops to a supreme act of condescension to remedy the evil. This would be like the case of the shepherd leaving the ninety-nine sheep who are safe in his fold and going out to rescue one lost sheep. Since we know absolutely nothing about life in other worlds than ours, any conjectures on the subject must be quite nugatory. Still, if we can allow our imagination to work with analogies we may see how improbable it is that there should be one and only one such exceptional species in a universe of moral and intelligent beings—if indeed such a universe exists.

But now we may meet the objection in another way. We have no proof that the Incarnation realized in the Person of Christ is absolutely unique in the history of the universe. We can see what God is doing with us; we have no means of knowing what He is doing elsewhere. One thing, however, we may believe—that He will be always true to Himself, that He is not narrowly partial towards any of His

creatures, that He is not to be judged like a small-minded Oriental despot who has irrational preferences according to which he arbitrarily selects his favourites. If there are other worlds than ours, and if any of those worlds are in the same plight as our unhappy world—or shall we say, if any of them share our brilliant possibilities?—is there not every reason to believe that God would deal with them exactly as He has dealt with us? To say less is to share the spirit of Jewish exclusiveness which would begrudge the gospel to all beyond the pale of the favoured race. Because with our very limited horizon we have only evidence of one act of divine condescension, such as we see in the Incarnation, we have no right to say that this stands alone in God's universe. For anything that we know this may be typical of God's actions as we are sure that it is characteristic of His nature. All this floats in regions of speculation where reason has no foothold on grounds of fact. I only advert to it in order to ward off objections that presume on a negation. As we cannot deny the possibility of such things we have no right to argue on the assumption that they do not exist. But if we

cannot make that assumption, the objection to the Incarnation, on the ground of its uniqueness and the improbability of our one little world being selected for the amazing privilege, vanishes.

IX

A common difficulty with regard to the Incarnation has been felt in the consideration of a supposed incompatibility of union between the divine and the human. This has grown out of a one-sided view of the transcendence of God. The chasm between earth and heaven has seemed to be so immense that any bridge across it has been deemed an impossibility. Now that difficulty diminishes just in proportion as we are able to accept the position which I have tried to take up in an earlier part of this discussion. If man is made in the image of God, God must be conceived of in the image of man. If, as Channing taught, all minds are of one family, the chasm between man and God does not exist. He is infinitely greater than we are, infinitely holier, infinitely better in every way. Yet He

touches us on all sides; and He is like us in essential spiritual nature.

It was the teaching of Apollinaris, whom Professor Harnack regards as the greatest speculative theologian of the fourth century —that age of the greatest Fathers of the Church—that in the infinite Being of God there is something corresponding to human nature, and that it is this one thing in God, among an infinity of other things that may not be so akin to us, that appears in Christ and constitutes the Incarnation. If we can accept this view—without going the length of Apollinaris's special "heresy," the denial of full humanity in Christ — we may see not only a possibility of an Incarnation, but even a predisposition towards it. The schoolmen discussed the question whether Christ would ever have come if Adam had never fallen. Those who answered that question in the affirmative could claim some of St. Paul's teaching in favour of it. The great Apostle regards Christ as the Second Adam, not merely remedying the mischief of the first Adam, but also carrying the race on to a higher stage than it had ever known before the Fall. Quite apart from the story in Genesis, the same

question presents itself to us to-day. Fall or no Fall, the world as we know it is immersed in a foul flood of sin, and the gospel of Christ is the means of its deliverance. But is not the gospel of Christ even more than that? Cannot we see that the Kingdom of Heaven is better than Paradise Regained, that God's destined last state of man is better than his first state? If so, may not the Incarnation—over and above the specific purpose of redemption—be even in some way a normal fact, the crowning and perfecting of humanity by God's complete union with it in one Man, through whom He will communicate Himself to other men according to their capacity to receive Him? Meanwhile Christ is most divine in being perfectly human. He is the one true Man the world has ever seen. Therefore He is the most perfect image of God to us. His Divinity does not render Him unhuman; it makes Him most human.

Nor are we compelled to regard the Incarnation as so totally without preparation or parallel on earth as some presentations of it assume. If we think of the world as a God-deserted wilderness of helpless humanity suddenly visited by a Divine Saviour through

whom for the first time God comes into close relations with it, such an event would seem to be too great a shock of novelty and contrary to all the known processes of His action, whether in Nature or in human lives; for these are all by way of growth, development, evolution, education.

But it is not the case that there was no preparation for the Incarnation in the history of the race. St. Paul says that it occurred "in the fulness of the time"; that is to say, when the time was ripe for it. This is the reason why it happened just when it did, after so many ages of pre-Christian history. Those ages were not wasted in weary waiting for the world's long-needed Redeemer. Nor had God deserted His poor helpless children during all that vast time—now to be measured only by geologic æons back to the age of paleolithic man—and who can say how long before? Paleolithic man could not have understood a Christ if He had appeared among the cave-dwellers. But with the dawn of the higher intelligence came the birth of a God-consciousness in the race, a dim perception of some other world than ours, and then of some higher world. Later on we see in Jewish history how God

was continually coming near to those of His children who could best perceive His presence, so that a psalmist could declare that he had heard the voice of God saying, "Seek ye My face," and had gladly responded, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek." In history, in prophecy, in mystical experience, God was continually drawing near to man. At last the Incarnation was His full coming into our human world. We have no ground for the notion that has been held by some, according to which God was actually incarnate before Christ—in Noah, Melchizadek, and others—or that He has been or will be again incarnate among men. But Justin Martyr's idea that the Old Testament theophanies were pre-Christian appearances of the *Logos* has this much in its favour, that it suggests the humanly sympathetic in God, what we may regard as the eternally human in God, as His continuous medium of communication with us.

X

And yet after all, it may be said, is not this idea of the dwelling of the Maker of heaven and earth in one limited human life

paradoxical and self-contradictory? Am I to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was possessed of almighty power and universal knowledge? That has been maintained. Cyril of Alexandria held that while our Lord lay in the manger, apparently as helpless as any other infant, He was actually administering the affairs of the universe, and that when He appeared ignorant of anything this was only in appearance. It has been said that He did not know it—in regard to His hearers—while in Himself He was perfectly aware of it, and of every other fact in the universe.

Surely this is quibbling with words; it is a suggestion of dishonesty; and it destroys the actuality of the Incarnation. Under such circumstances Christ could not have been a real man. The notion is equivalent to Docetism. The docetics thought that the human body of Jesus was an unreal appearance; those who present this view to us suggest that the human mind of Jesus was not less phantasmal. If He was a man at all He must have shared our natural human limitations of power and knowledge.

How, then, could He be an incarnation of God? Let us go back to the point at which

we began. We saw that the most essential characteristic of God, as revealed to us in Christ, is His love, that the greatest truth about God known to us is that God is love. Now, that truth is most apparent in Christ. Nor do we see any limit to it in His life and character. If we use the word "perfect" rather than "infinite," as more suitable for a moral quality, we may say that as Christ is perfect in love, the perfect love of God is manifest in Him. We see, then, no limit to the perfect love of God in Christ, therefore no limit to His moral and spiritual perfection. If, in addition, He had the wisdom and power necessary for His mission, so that the love and goodness should not be futile and ineffectual, but active and victorious, no greater power or wisdom would be necessary. In these respects the Incarnation might be limited, nay, must be limited if it is to be a reality at all.

This may be regarded as a very partial view of the Incarnation. But the limitations it implies have been accounted for in two ways. The first is the Kenotic theory, suggested especially by what St. Paul says in the second chapter of his letter to the Philippians. The Son of God voluntarily

lays aside certain divine attributes in order to bring Himself down to the level of a human life—in particular gives up infinite power and universal knowledge. This would be really a glorious act of condescension. It is much to give up wealth, position, honour; but it is more to give up personal powers and faculties. Who, among us, would lower and limit our intellects and become less able and capable for the benefit of our fellow-men? That is one of the greatest possible kinds of condescension.

Celsus, Origen's antagonist, sneered at the notion of the Incarnation followed by the crucifixion as dishonouring to the Divine Being. It was a vulgar objection, as though it would be "to demean Himself" for Christ to stoop so low. The sneer revealed total ignorance of the Christian spirit. It is of the essence of the gospel to teach that self-emptying, self-humbling, self-sacrificing are really the most glorious actions, if done for the good of others. In them we see the glory of love. Therefore Jesus refers to His approaching death of ignominy as His being glorified. When the Christian surveys the wondrous cross of Christ, he perceives in it the symbol of what

is most glorious in his Saviour—but if most glorious, then most divine. Jesus was never so evidently divine as when He died for the sins of the world; God was never so clearly revealed to us as when His love was made most apparent by the death of Christ.

Another way of viewing these limitations of Christ is that apparently held by Irenaeus and revived in our own day by Dorner, the most learned historian of the Church's doctrine of Christ. The suggestion is that the Incarnation was a gradual process increasing in fulness as our Lord's human life developed from infancy upwards, so that there came to be more and more of God in Him as He advanced in human knowledge and capacity and strength. Thus throughout, Christ is as fully divine as it is possible for any one within the limits of His life at the time to be. Possibly some of us may think this view more acceptable than the Kenotic theory.

XI

There is one further objection to the doctrine of the Incarnation to which I can

only briefly refer. It is said that a Christ of divine nature could not be an example for us, because He would have powers which we do not possess. To this objection I would hint at three replies:

(1) Christ was really tempted even more than we are, because, as Mr. Latham pointed out, we all break down under the strain of temptation at some point; but He endured to the very end—beyond the point where we find it unendurable, and therefore yield, He never yielded. There were final turns of the rack on which His sensitive nature was stretched to which no other man has had the courage or strength to go.

(2) Christ never used His superhuman powers for His own convenience. The significance of the temptations in the wilderness lies in this fact. He would not employ the divine energy in Him to feed His hunger or advance His projects. On the other hand, since every new possession or faculty brings a new temptation, Christ was tempted beyond us in those very things wherein He differed from us.

(3) The most important truth for us in regard to Christ is not that He is our Example, but that He is our Redeemer.

Even if we had to sacrifice the exemplary influence of Christ—which I do not allow—but still retained His redeeming work, the great end of the gospel would be secure.

CHAPTER VIII

The Holy Spirit

I

ANYBODY who has attempted to present to his mind a definite idea of the Third Person of the Trinity must admit that his efforts have ended in failure. There is a vagueness, an intangibility, a mystery in this idea that lead to its eluding our grasp whenever we attempt to lay hold of it. The very images of the Spirit—wind, fire, a dove, tongues—indicate the necessity of contemplating the subject only by way of analogy.

This is not surprising, for it results from the essential nature of the subject under consideration. Whatever else the Holy Spirit may be for us, the immediate fact is that we use the name for the agency of God's immediate working in our spirits. This is a subjective experience, and we have no objective

knowledge of the Spirit beyond it. Christ appeared outwardly in a human life, with a man's body and soul. Therefore we can have a conception of Him in terms of the objective world. A vision of Christ would be a vision of a human presence, as in the external world. But to speak of a vision of the Holy Spirit would be to utter a contradiction in terms. The images of the Spirit of which we read in the Bible can be only symbols, not representations, for the simple reason that all we know of the Spirit is an interior experience. To be more explicit, we know nothing of the Spirit *per se*. We only know the operations, graces, fruits of the Spirit.

II

Further, the idea of the Holy Spirit is entirely a Biblical, and more especially a New Testament, idea in its origin and authority. It is an interpretation of the experience of souls, and in turn it is interpreted by later experiences. We first receive it as the generalized record of what seers have beheld and prophets have declared and saints have felt and the Church has

manifested of God's direct dealings with His children. Then we endeavour to discover how our own dim vision and dull hearing and poor spiritual life may contain faint shadows and echoes of those wonderful experiences of which we read in Scripture and in the history of the Church. In so far as, with all our backwardness of development and deplorably imperfect Christian life, we can humbly, sincerely declare that even we know something of this great wonder, though but its alphabet and elemental beginnings, we may be able to come to some partial notion of the truth concerning the Holy Spirit. St. Paul insists that spiritual things must be spiritually discerned. Therefore an unspiritual consideration and discussion of these things, even on the part of people who are really trying on the whole to live a spiritual life, must of necessity be nothing but the attempt of blind men to lead the blind, and its issue cannot be less humiliating.

In approaching this subject, therefore, I am bound to check myself on the threshold by asking, who am I, that I should dare to touch so high a theme? There is only one thing possible without presumption. It is to study the literary and historical approaches

to it as we see them in the Bible and in the records of Christian lives, and then to leave the search in the inner sanctuary for each individual reader as far as his own spiritual experience may have been enriched with the grace for pursuing it.

The first and more modest and simple task, which is all that I shall attempt, may prepare for the richer and more fruitful interior contemplation, because the spiritual life does not blossom and bear fruit apart from the intellectual. What we think and believe and know profoundly affects our inner and higher life.

Now I have characterized the idea of the Holy Spirit as essentially Scriptural, though based on original experiences, and to be interpreted by later experiences. I do not mean that God's Spirit has not been felt influencing any men and women except Jews in the older age and Christians in later times. Surely the impartial Father of all must be believed to have breathed His helping Spirit into His human family of all races and in all ages in so far as the several peoples were able to receive the heavenly gift. When Socrates speaks of the spirit that he calls a *daimonion* as a voice within him to warn him

against a wrong course, the Christian may say that this was as truly an influence of God's Holy Spirit as that experienced by St. Paul, when, as St. Luke tells us, he was "forbidden of the Holy Ghost" to take a certain course that he was contemplating.

III

Nevertheless, there are two reasons why we may describe the idea of the Holy Spirit as essentially Scriptural and Christian. In the first place, most, if not all, of our knowledge of the subject, and the language and imagery with which we discuss it, are derived from the Bible; and, in the second place, the Spirit has come on the Church with especial fulness through Christ. St. Paul says, "He has ascended up on high to give gifts unto men"—gifts that were not known before—so that we have a peculiarly Christian experience to deal with. In our Christian Era much more is felt and realized of the activity and working of the Holy Spirit than had been previously experienced, so that this is emphatically the age of the Spirit.

IV

Turning, then, to the Biblical treatment of the subject, we find this, like every other theme of revelation, to be a matter of development and gradual growth. In the Old Testament we read much about God's Spirit; but the expression "the Holy Spirit" is not there used, though twice God is described as speaking of "My Holy Spirit," and twice we meet with references to God's "Good Spirit." We must remember that in primitive times, since the word "Spirit" meant "breath" or "wind," both in Hebrew and in Greek, as well as in the Latin language, from which our word "Spirit" is derived, more or less materialistic notions were often associated with it. Old Testament scholars have suggested that the most ancient reference to God's Spirit is to be found in that strange passage about the sons of God and the daughters of men, which they take to be a very primitive fragment imbedded in the narrative of Genesis. There we read of a threat of the withdrawal of God's Spirit which is striving, or perhaps moving and working,

among men.* This would seem to mean that the Divine Spirit is the source of man's life and activity, and that the withdrawal of it would issue in death. Thus it is really vital energy, rather than anything spiritual in our understanding of the term; but this vital energy is dependent on the good will of God. If He withdraws it, man dies. Curiously enough the same idea occurs in one of the latest books of the Old Testament, where death is described as the return of the spirit to God, not in the lofty conception according to which the Christian may think of going home to his Father in heaven, to be "for ever with the Lord," but with a purely physiological meaning, "the vital spark" being drawn back to its primary source.† Intermediate between these periods come the accounts of the Creation, in one of which God's Spirit hovers—shall we say, like a dove?—over the chaos of waters waiting for God's creative word to enter into the new world and infuse life into it, while in the other it is God's Spirit breathed into man that gives him his peculiarly human life so that he is made in the image of God. In neither of

* Gen. vi. 3. † Eccl. xii. 7.

these cases is the Divine Spirit represented as a person ; in both of them vital processes are indicated, not any of those peculiarly religious influences which we associate with the Holy Spirit.

Earlier in the production of Hebrew literature than the Pentateuch as we now know it, with the exception of primitive fragments, like stones found embedded in conglomerate rock—to one of which I have referred—comes the Book of Judges. It is here, therefore, that we must look for the most complete presentation of primitive ideas of the Spirit of God. That book contains many references to the subject. Those national heroes, the judges, gain their prowess and win their triumphs by no inherent might or valour of their own, but through the influence of God's Spirit upon them. Othniel, Jephthah, Samson, each has the Spirit of God coming on him to fit him for his task. Samson loses his strength when he breaks his vow, because then God's Spirit is withdrawn from him. Even this very imperfect man, whose name stands almost at the bottom of the list of Israel's heroes, is no mere prodigy of muscle. His strength is not the strength of a Hercules,

his own native vigour; it is a gift of the Spirit of God. Similarly, in the Pentateuch, Bezaleel's artistic skill is a gift of God's Spirit. All this, though pregnant with religious suggestiveness, does not lead us as yet to the contemplation of what the New Testament has taught us to regard as really spiritual; that is to say, the awakening and activity of our higher nature in communion with God. It indicates influences from God operating in the sphere of man's earthly activity and secular interests.

It is when we come to the prophets that loftier conceptions of the Spirit of God begin to appear. Even here, however, at first the notion of inspiration is very materialistic. The inspired person is flung into a trance or an ecstasy which leads him to act almost like a madman. When Saul prophesies he leaps and shrieks in an orgie of religious excitement. Such conduct suggests the antics of the howling dervish. In fact, it is essentially the same.

How utterly different is the true prophecy of Israel, that loftiest utterance of spiritual truth! This, too, is attributed to the Spirit of God. It is the inner experience of the Spirit that opens the prophet's eyes to see

awful visions, and fires his eloquence to declare mighty truths. But even this is regarded only as a beginning. Moses wished that all the Lord's people were prophets; Joel predicted the day when that should be the case, when indeed God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh so that the young men should see visions and the old men dream dreams.

The future richer endowment of the Spirit is especially associated with the Messiah, as His peculiar privilege. God's Spirit is to be on Him pre-eminently.

V

Lastly, we have the loftiest, purest, most truly religious conceptions of the Spirit of God in the Psalms. One psalmist prays that God will not take His Holy Spirit from him. Another beseeches God to quicken him with His free Spirit. Just in proportion as religion has become more inward and vital and spiritual, the thought of God's Spirit as its source, quickener, and sustenance has also become more elevated.

Putting all this together we have God's

Spirit represented in the Old Testament as creative power and vital energy; as the cause of personal prowess and skill; as a rousing, exciting influence; in primitive prophecy, as the inspiration of great ideas; and, lastly, as the source and sustenance of spiritual life in the individual soul.

In all this there is no idea of a distinction of persons such as we meet with subsequently in Christian theology. The Spirit of God is just God Himself acting directly in some way upon nature or man. The Oriental habit of hypostasizing "the name," "the glory," "the light," "the truth," and "the arm" of God is seen in language which apparently personifies "the Spirit"; more than this cannot be asserted of the Divine Spirit in the Old Testament. On the whole, the value of its references to this subject is chiefly to be found in the fact that they counterbalance the excessive tendency of the Jewish mind to magnify the transcendence of God. Regarding Jehovah so much as the Monarch on His throne in unapproachable glory, and secluded by the very idea of His holiness, the Jew was still able to enjoy the thought of God's present help and inspiring communion by attributing these

experiences to the Spirit of God. As God sends forth His light and truth to guide His children, so He breathes His Spirit into them to quicken their energies and enrich their faculties. Two prophecies especially illustrate this idea. One of these is Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones, where the wind that blows life into the recovered bodies represents God's Spirit reviving the broken and scattered Israelite nation. The other is Zechariah's answer to those faint-hearted Jews of the Restoration who are discouraging Zerubbabel in his hard task, when he gives the people the inspiring message from God : "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord."

When we pass on to the New Testament we must remember that all its writers and most of its readers were familiar with the Old Testament. If, therefore, they use an expression often met with in the earlier Scriptures, we may suppose that this will be with a reference to its ancient meaning. Some centuries had passed in the interval, and it is important to notice that during this time the idea of the Spirit of God had faded out of the minds of the Jews. Most of the Apocrypha, especially that which had its

origin in Palestine, is almost entirely oblivious of this idea. Perhaps its secularity and religious barrenness may be in part connected with that fact as cause or effect. An unspiritual age will not have any attraction for spiritual truth; but conversely the drifting of a generation away from spiritual truth will result in unspirituality of life. Thus the two conditions mutually act and react on one another.

There is one book, however, which is in some measure an exception to this spiritual barrenness and neglect of the thought of the Spirit of God in the time of the Apocrypha. That is the Book of Wisdom, a work more often echoed in the New Testament than any other production not in the Hebrew canon. This book represents an important stage in the development of Jewish thought at Alexandria. In it we find wisdom identified with the Spirit of God. It may be remarked that in the more precisely defined classification of patristic theology, wisdom is identified with the Son, the *Logos* doctrine being an intermediary in the process. Thus for Christian thought wisdom stands not for the Third, but for the Second Person of the Trinity.

VI

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is very prominent in the New Testament. All the Apostolic speakers and writers were conscious of the fact that they lived in the era of the Spirit. This was the most characteristic note of the new age, as St. Peter had clearly perceived and enthusiastically declared on the day of Pentecost. But there are three New Testament writers who give especial prominence to the subject; and therefore it may be well for us to study it in the light of their teachings. These writers are Luke, Paul, and John.

We will begin with St. Luke. When we compare this evangelist with his two companion synoptic writers, we shall soon see how much more frequent and explicit are his references to the Holy Spirit. Both Matthew and Luke ascribe the conception of the Infant Jesus by Mary to the influence of the Holy Spirit, but the latter most fully (see Luke i. 35). There is nothing here to indicate any advance on the Old Testament idea of the Divine Spirit. It is God Himself who brings about the Incarnation. But we must remember that Luke was a disciple

of Paul, and that he wrote his Gospel after his travelling companionship with the great Apostle. It is reasonable, therefore, to suppose that he was aware of the teachings on the subject of the Holy Spirit which are known to us in the Pauline Epistles.

Next it is important to observe that, not Luke alone, but all the evangelists lay great stress on the fact that John the Baptist distinguished the mission of the coming Christ from his own mission by pointing to the baptism of the Holy Spirit as the peculiar feature of the new and greater ministry. To Mark's statement of this fact Matthew and Luke add that it will be a baptism of fire. That has been taken by some as an alternative—meaning that those who do not receive the Spirit will be consumed in the fire. But it is more natural to understand the expression to characterize the baptism with the Spirit, suggesting that this will itself be a baptism of fire. We must not think of the fire of enthusiasm, of a fiery energy, in this connection. The context shows that reference is to a consuming fire, a fire that is to burn up the chaff. John thinks of Christ as coming for judgment, one result of His mission being to purge

the world of evil, either by burning it out of the souls of those who follow Him, or by consuming those souls in the judgment if they will not submit to the purging process.

All the evangelists lay stress on the coming of the Spirit on Christ at His baptism as a very real event. The symbol of the dove—in the earliest account only recognized by Jesus Himself—was in accordance with well-known Jewish imagery, now to be met with in the Talmud. It has been traced to the picture in Genesis of the Divine Spirit hovering over the waters at the dawn of Creation. The same Spirit reappears at the birth of the New Creation. But the first effect of the Spirit on Christ is to drive Him into the wilderness for temptation. After that His powers, both of preaching and of healing, are attributed to the Spirit of God, especially in Luke. His own words in the synagogue at Nazareth claim an ancient promise of the Spirit for His mission. Later on His warning of the dreadful doom of sinning against the Holy Ghost—in wilfully treating good as evil—shows us that the word "holy," now almost universally associated with the Divine Spirit,

marks an advance beyond the Old Testament positions in which almost any power or energy is attributed to God's Spirit. Now the Spirit is especially the inspirer of all that is good and the antagonist of evil. At the same time the Spirit is spoken of more distinctly as a Person.

The Acts of the Apostles may almost be described as the Book of the Spirit. The missions it describes start from the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. All that is done in the Church since then is accomplished in the power of the Spirit. The grand endowment of the early Christians is their possession of this gift. Twelve disciples of John the Baptist found at Ephesus are seen to be in a backward state, simply owing to their ignorance of it; but when the gift falls upon them they are at once recognized as fully converted Christians.

Throughout this treatment of the subject by St. Luke the Holy Spirit is regarded chiefly as the source of gifts and powers. There is the ecstasy of the tongues; there is power of healing; there is preaching and converting; and there is the joy and enthusiasm of the brotherhood all quickened and fired by the Spirit. We cannot say,

however, that St. Luke gives us any approach to a doctrine of the Holy Spirit. We may try to deduce such a doctrine from his narratives. But those narratives are really concerned with the works of the Spirit, not at all with the nature of the Spirit.

VII

It is in the writings of St. Paul that we have the richest and most varied treatment of this subject. And yet it is not always easy to give a clear explanation of the Apostle's meaning. This, however, is not entirely because his language is obscure or his thinking confused. The reason is to be found chiefly in the nature of the subject. St. Paul does not distinguish between the operation of the Holy Spirit and the action of our own spiritual nature. Sometimes when he uses the expression "the spirit" we cannot say for certain whether he means the divine or the human spirit. Our translators vary in their decision on the point, which they indicate by the use of a capital initial "S," or a small "s," according as they

think the one or the other application of the word "spirit" is intended.

This would be unpardonably careless in any writer who definitely separated the divine and the human spiritual existences, so that when he was referring to one of them the other was excluded. But that is not the case with St. Paul. The Apostle only conceives of our spirit at all as the element in us which is influenced by the Spirit of God; and he only writes about the Spirit of God in relation to human experience. Thus he never thinks of the one apart from the other.

To be spiritually minded rather than carnally minded is not merely to be developing our higher nature and giving our attention to its demands and interests; it is to be receiving influences from the Holy Spirit, and living in communion with God. With St. Paul there is no spirituality at all without this. If he thinks of man as consisting of three elements—body, soul, and spirit—he conceives of the third of these elements as dead or dormant in every one who has not received the Spirit of God. Practically it is non-existent in such a person. He knows nothing of it. Therefore he is "carnal"—living

according to the flesh; and he is a "natural man." The word rendered "natural" is an adjective meaning that which belongs to the soul as the principle of the lower life in distinction from the spirit which is the principle of the higher life. Literally it is "psychical," appertaining to the *psyche* or natural soul. Apparently St. Paul does not distinguish between these two conditions of the unspiritual man. The "natural man" is the "carnal man." The old Adam is carnal. Entirely different is the spiritual man. He lives and walks in the Spirit. He has received the gift of the Holy Spirit which has quickened and awakened his own spiritual nature. In the pursuit of his new higher life he must continue the connection between the divine and the human in him. Directly he breaks it off he ceases to be spiritual, he falls back on the carnal, the "natural," the life of his merely human soul.

Thus, with St. Paul, the Christian life is an inspiration. This is more than mysticism. It is not merely spiritual insight — the spiritual discerning of spiritual things; it is a new, a higher life realized by the indwelling of the Spirit of God. Accordingly the Apostle regards the Church, and even

the body of the individual Christian, as a temple of the Holy Ghost.

The consequences of this indwelling of the Holy Spirit are seen in many ways. The Spirit of God intercedes with our spirits, rouses them to true effectual prayer, and so helps us to realize the Fatherhood of God, and cry "Abba, Father." The divine gift bears fruit in various graces—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, etc. Perhaps we should distinguish the gifts of the Spirit from these fruits of the Spirit; the tendency was and always is to make too much of the former, which are more or less external and sensational. The Corinthians prided themselves on their gifts, putting the "tongues" first. St. Paul put the "tongues" last and set prophecy highest among the gifts; but love, the best of the fruits of the Spirit, even higher than that.

Now, in all this we read much about the operation of the Holy Spirit, but nothing is stated concerning the very being and nature of the Spirit. Still, there are characteristics of the source manifested by its effects. The source from which so much good comes must be itself powerful, gracious, pure. The interpenetrating influence of the

Spirit reaching our deepest thoughts, impressing our inmost motives, indicates the opposite to a solitary, reserved, indifferent Presence. The Spirit of God is seen to be pre-eminently sympathetic, and, if I may use the term without irreverence, social.

VIII

Lastly, we have much about the Holy Spirit in St. John—especially in his Gospel. Clement of Alexandria well characterized this book as "the spiritual Gospel." It is here that we have our Lord's greatest teachings on the Holy Spirit. They occur especially in the conversation with Nicodemus and in the discourse after the Supper.

Jesus warns Nicodemus that mere teaching and miracle-working are not the chief things. The first requisite is a birth from above, a birth from the Spirit. This is a tremendous reality. There can be no doubt about it when it is experienced. The Spirit comes like the wind, the sound of which can be heard. Yet like the wind it comes in mystery. Nothing could more explicitly set before us the truth which we have seen again and again while studying this subject,

that we can only know the effects of the Holy Spirit's activity, that we cannot know the Divine Spirit directly and objectively.

In His last discourse Jesus promises the Holy Spirit as "another Comforter," or rather Advocate and Helper. That is to be the compensation for His departure. He even puts the prospect more strongly. It is expedient that He should go away, for if He did not go away the Comforter would not come. Plainly this implies that it is more important to have the Comforter with us than to have the bodily presence of Christ. The inward Spirit is more than the external sight, voice, touch, human manifestation of the Divine. It is worth while to lose Christ on earth in order that we may receive what is better—the Spirit. We may remember St. Paul's teaching that the gift of the Spirit is the consequence of the sacrifice of Christ, and again that Christ has ascended up on high in order to give gifts unto men. In this last great discourse—the chief theme of which is the promise of the Spirit—we learn that the Comforter will convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; will bring Christ's teachings to the remembrance of His disciples; and will enable

them to do even greater things than He did.

Here in John, as earlier in Luke and in Paul, it is the work of the Spirit, the influence, effect of the gift of the Spirit, not the actual nature of the Spirit, of which we read. That remains a profound mystery, as Jesus told Nicodemus that it must remain.

IX

In gathering up the conclusions to which this rapid survey of the revelation of the Holy Spirit leads us there are three considerations that call for some attention.

First, there is the truth of the Divinity of the Holy Spirit. In the fourth century this was disputed by the Arians. In particular, those semi-Arians who followed the teachings of Macedonius, the patriarch of Constantinople, asserted that the Holy Spirit was a created being. If the Second Person of the Trinity was a Creature, much more, it was thought, must the Third Person be a Creature. This strange notion has no supporter in the present day. Nor is there room for any parallel to the Unitarian position. It is possible to say that Jesus was only a man,

since He was at least a man. But nothing like this could be said of the Holy Spirit, because here we see no earthly life, no bodily appearance, no objective presence discernible by the senses or even imaginable by the mind. Either the Holy Spirit is God Himself working in us, or all that we read and know and experience that points to any such activity must be a delusion.

This entirely agrees with the New Testament treatment of the subject. Whatever may be the sin against the Holy Ghost, concerning which Jesus gave His gravest warning, since it is even less pardonable than sin against Himself, it cannot be regarded by Him as an offence to any created being; it is, indeed, the worst form of blasphemy against God. The baptismal formula in Matthew has been submitted to critical inquiries on which we cannot now enter. As it stands, no doubt it associates the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son. A similar association is to be seen in St. Paul's benediction, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all," and, indeed, in many New Testament passages. St. Paul writes of the

Christian being a temple of the Holy Ghost as equivalent to his being a temple of God. There really can be no doubt that the Divinity of the Holy Spirit is taught throughout the New Testament, and this agrees with what we must believe concerning the Holy Spirit in all that we know of the graces and fruits of the Spirit. They come from God Himself if anything comes from God; they are His very best gifts to us.

Secondly, we are confronted by the question of the relation of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit to that of the immanence of God. We cannot keep these two ideas apart, for they cover much the same ground. Are we, then, to say that the conception of the Holy Spirit is only one form in which we contemplate the immanence, or does it represent something over and above that universal truth? We shall, indeed, be plunged in a strange confusion of thought if we attempt to compare these two things as separate facts of the spiritual world. The easiest way out of the difficulty is to assert that they are one and the same thing with different names. It may be said that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is simply the immanence of God; or it may be said

that God is immanent in us through His Spirit.

There is, however, a distinctive experience associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit which is not found in the idea of immanence. The latter is universal and independent of our personal conditions; not so the former. The Christian teaching is that there are specific endowments of the Holy Spirit given through Christ to those who are in a fit state to receive them, and withheld from others; and this teaching is confirmed by experience. There have been men filled with the Spirit, doing great deeds for God in the might of this endowment; but that cannot be said of all men.

Of course it is possible to hold that these specific Christian experiences result from a peculiar manifestation of the immanence of God, or an especially responsive sympathy with it, so that it becomes more consciously effective under certain circumstances, and that this is what really happens in what we regard as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

X

This question is intimately connected with the third consideration, on which I can only

touch before concluding the chapter. I refer to the idea of the personality of the Holy Spirit. Writers on the subject sometimes assert that God is personally present in the endowment of the Holy Spirit, and that since God is a Person, of course the gift of His Spirit must be personal. But that is not what is meant by the personality of the Holy Spirit.

When it is said that the Holy Spirit is a Person, not an influence, the language excludes any contemplation of the immanence of God. The influence is supposed to be exerted from a distance, like gravitation. It may be conceived as coming in a sort of emanation or effluence. But with the idea of immanence any conception of influence apart from the present personality vanishes. The immanent God influences, but He influences directly. There is no intermediary entity to which the idea of "*an* influence" can be given. With Ritschl the notion of the Holy Spirit was little if anything more than the conception of the felt effect of the gospel story on those who contemplated it aright. But then Ritschl opposed the whole mystical conception of religion.

When we have come to believe in the real

personal inner presence of God, we may still have the special question of the personality of the Holy Spirit raised, for this means a third separate personality over and above the personalities of the Father and the Son. Christ's words about sin against the Holy Ghost seem to imply such a separate personality; so do His utterances about the Paraclete as "another Comforter" to come after Him. St. Paul writes of "the same Spirit, dividing to each one severally even as he will" (1 Cor. xii. 11), as though the Holy Spirit had a distinct personal will. But this leads us to the question of the persons in the Trinity, and it had better be considered in that relation.

CHAPTER IX

The Trinity

I

IN the opening chapter of this book I called attention to the fact that theologians are accustomed to set forth the doctrine of the Trinity as the characteristically Christian conception of God. But at the same time it was seen that this view sprang more from the consideration of later theology than from the study of the gospel at its fountain head. Nobody who went straight to Christ for his knowledge of God would come to the conclusion that this consisted chiefly in the idea of the Trinity. Christ brings home to us the great fact of the Fatherhood of God; by His own life and death, in the light of His own example, even more than by the words that He spoke, He enabled His most intimate disciple to see

and declare the underlying, vital truth that God is love.

Nevertheless, the doctrine of the Trinity is essentially Christian. That statement may be read two ways with, I believe, equal correctness. In the first place the idea of it springs out of genuine Christian facts and truths. It is not merely a Church doctrine, and therefore Christian in the wider, looser sense of the term. Many notions have been reckoned as belonging to Christianity which were mere accretions, parasitic growths, like mistletoe on an apple-tree, not genuine sprouts from the parent stock. Although the Nicene Creed appeared nearly three centuries later than the New Testament, and although its metaphysical phraseology was very unlike the language of the Sermon on the Mount, and even very unlike that of the Epistles of Paul and John, it sought its justification in the New Testament, and it could appeal to fundamental Trinitarian statements in the Apostolic writings and in the teachings of Christ. If some think this statement too strong, I may say that at least the materials out of which the doctrine has been built up have been quarried from the Scriptures. There are sayings of Jesus,

facts of the gospel story, and teachings of the Apostles, which, to my mind, as to the minds of the great majority of Christian inquirers in all ages, point to some such a conclusion about the Being and nature of God as theologians have attempted to express in Trinitarian terms. That is what I mean in the first place by saying that the doctrine of the Trinity is essentially Christian—not merely that it is a Church dogma held by Christians, but that it is true to the facts and ideas of genuine essential Christianity, the Christianity of Christ Himself and His truest interpreters. This must be considered more in detail.

Meanwhile, there is to be noted a second way in which this statement of the essentially Christian character of the doctrine of the Trinity may be taken. It is found in Christianity and nowhere else. It is a Christian doctrine and only a Christian doctrine. Apart from Christ and His followers we should know nothing of it. I do not ignore the infusion of Greek thought in the later development of Christian doctrine. Undoubtedly the ecclesiastical definitions of dogma, especially the Christological formulæ, as well as those that attempt to describe

the nature of God, are shaped in the language of Greek metaphysics. But even these very formulæ would not have been produced apart from the kernels of original Christian thought that they contain. After all, when we have made the largest possible allowance for the Hellenic element, it is a palpable fact that this doctrine was elaborated in the Church, not in the schools of philosophy; that it took shape at Nicea in a Christian Council, not at Athens among the pagan rhetoricians and sophists.

II

Analogies and supposed parallels to the Christian doctrine have been brought forward from various sources. We have an Indian trinity, a Platonic trinity, and possibly other conceivable trinities. But they are all quite different from the Christian Trinity. A group of gods in a polytheistic system, even if they are regarded by philosophic thinkers as but illusory phases of the being of the one god Brahm, cannot be compared to the Christian threefold existence, in which there is no illusion, and yet which is essentially monotheistic. Nor can the ideal differences

of the Platonic system compare with the Christian conception of a personal God in whatever way we may regard the threefoldness of His nature.

III

Similarly, I cannot but think that any attempts to deduce the doctrine of the Trinity by means of *à priori* arguments are, to say the least, very precarious. Would anybody have dreamed of them apart from the fact that the doctrine was already in the field? If so, how came it to be left for Christian thinkers, already familiar with the idea on other grounds, to work out these arguments? Some of them appeared in patristic times, and have been well known from the days of Augustine. Thus it has been argued that since it is of the nature of God to love, His love must always have had an object. But—it has been assumed—creation did not always exist. Therefore before creation God must have had some other object of affection. This He found in His eternal Son. In reply it might be said —as, indeed, Origen did say—that, since God is changeless, if He ever creates He

must be always creating, so that there must have been an infinite series of created worlds existing from all eternity. If that is a correct view there never was any time when He had no creature to love.

But, we are told, the Infinite God could not find satisfaction for His infinite love in any finite creatures. He must have an object of affection as divine as Himself. We should be careful how we press this argument, for it may lead us to a dilemma. It may be met by the assertion of the alternatives: either the object of the love of God is another being, or He is God Himself. In the one case you abandon monotheism, for you have two gods; in the other, you sacrifice the very idea of love, for what we call self-love is really the very opposite to love in the true sense of the word.

These objections are met by the unique conception of the Trinity as consisting of One God in Three Persons. We shall have to examine that idea. Meanwhile it must be premised that any argument for the Trinity which really points to separate individualities does not support the Trinitarian idea, but makes straight for ditheism, or tritheism.

A more philosophic presentation of the same kind of argument takes the reason of God instead of His love for its starting-point. God has reason. Reason must have some object with which to deal. An infinite and eternal reason must have an infinite and eternal object. But the universe is finite and temporal. Only God is infinite and eternal. Therefore God's reason must find its adequate object in His own Being.

Much the same reply may be made to this argument as that which was suggested for the analogous argument based on the love of God. If the object of His thought is a different being from God Himself, we have a second god; if not, it is difficult to distinguish this from self-consciousness. We shall be led into mazes of metaphysics if we attempt to pursue the idea that self-consciousness only arises by setting one's self against the other-than-self, that subject and object are necessary for any consciousness. How can we reason from the limited nature of our own consciousness to the conditions of the divine consciousness? It is strange that some who exalt the idea of the Absolute also pursue this line of argumentation. Surely to offer conditions to the thinking

of the Absolute is to limit it. Hegel regarded himself as an orthodox Lutheran when he applied his logic to this subject, and found in the difference of subject and object, and the blending of the two opposites in a higher unity, a conception of the Trinity. But the Hegelian Trinity is not the Christian Trinity, because it does not involve the idea of a personal God.

IV

Therefore I turn from all these methods of argument as too ambitious and precarious, and at the same time too barren, to serve our purpose in any attempt either to elucidate or to demonstrate the idea of the Trinity. That idea is essentially Christian, not merely as the explanation of the Christian revelation, but as resting entirely upon that revelation. Without the light of Christ's life and work and teaching, and their effects on the world, it would not exist. We shall therefore do well to study it in that light.

It is not to be denied that the roots of the idea of the Trinity are to be found in the Old Testament. In saying this I do not refer to any of those passages to which in

former generations theologians appealed as evidences of actual Trinitarianism among the writers of the Hebrew Scriptures. The more exact critical study of the language and ideas of ancient Israel has made them impossible. Thus, the plural name for God, "Elohim," may not be an instance of *pluralis majestatis*, as Gesenius held, but in its origin a genuine plural; but if so, it would seem to point to the time when the Semitic people who first employed it had believed in a pantheon of divinities. When God is represented as saying, "Let *us* make man," etc., it is unhistorical to think of a consultation between the Persons of the Trinity in the manner of the consultations between the Father and the Son, which Milton describes in "Paradise Lost." Our Puritan poet, we must remember, was almost an Arian during those later years of his life when he composed his epics. If the phrase does not date from polytheistic times, it would seem to refer to the angels, who according to Jewish tradition were the agents of creation. The *Trisagion*, "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty," etc., has been adopted in the Church as a hymn of praise to the Triune God. But we know that the threefold

repetition of the adjective "holy" cannot be made to carry that significance. It was a form of emphasis. We cannot press the sacred number "three" in this and other cases into the service of Trinitarianism, any more than we can press the even more sacred number "seven" into a septentrian conception of God. We do, indeed, read of the "seven spirits" of God. But this must be with some idea of the sevenfold distribution of divine gifts and influences, or, perhaps, it refers to old ideas of attendant spirits, like the angels. Certainly it does not indicate a sevenfold division in the very nature of God.

V

Nevertheless, as I have said, we come upon roots of the idea of the Trinity in the Old Testament. The first essential for any such idea is that we escape from the notion that monotheism compels us to think of God as a Monad, as existing in simple interior unity of being. We must return to this point a little later on. Meanwhile it is to be observed that strange thoughts were growing up in later Judaism which tended to modify

the conception of God as existing in solitary personal being. I have already called attention to these thoughts when dealing with anticipations of the Divinity of Christ. We had "the glory," "the name," "the word" of the Lord. The Angel of the Covenant is almost identified with God Himself. It may be that we have an ideal personification of effluences and influences. Then the position of "Wisdom," becoming ever more and more personified in Hebrew philosophic literature, and the tendency to personify God's "Spirit," are two conspicuous instances of similar movements of thought. There is really no conception of Three Persons in the Godhead among all these strange, fluid ideas of God and His life in the world. But it cannot be denied that they prepare the soil for the seed of the Trinitarian doctrines.

It remains true, in spite of all attempts to discover the Trinity elsewhere, that Trinitarianism is essentially a Christian doctrine. We must look for its real sources in the New Testament, as we have to trace its formulation into a definite doctrine to the discussions of the Church theologians. The word "Trinity" does not occur in the New

Testament. Nor do we meet with it in the Christian Church earlier than quite the end of the second century. Still less do any of the New Testament writers attempt to give us any definition or explanation of the idea of the Trinity. Their teaching is spiritual and practical, not speculative and philosophical. The most abstruse of this writing, in St. Paul's Epistles, the opening passage of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and St. John's Gospel, is still fluid and literary in form, and its object is spiritual edification rather than intellectual education. We may deduce our doctrine of the Trinity from the New Testament. We shall not find it stated, established, and explained in that volume. Fundamentally the New Testament is the historical source of the doctrine rather than its exponent.

When we inquire how it was that so difficult, so perplexing, so essentially mysterious an idea grew up we must look for our answer in history. This is a historical doctrine in the sense that it is an attempt to generalize conclusions drawn from facts of history. Here at least we are on solid ground. Indeed, the ground is so solid that we cannot ignore it. Even if we

refuse to believe in any kind of Trinitarian idea we cannot demolish the facts. They remain when the theology built upon them has been banished to the limbo of the obsolete, and they remain to confront us with a demand for explanation if our religious thought is to be clear and reasonable. The doctrine of the Trinity has grown up as the least inadequate conception of the Godhead consistent with those facts.

VI

What, then, are the facts on which the Trinitarian idea has been formulated. We start with the unity of God. The believer in a Trinity must deny the antithesis between the words "Trinitarian" and "Unitarian"; he cannot admit that the denomination which has adopted the latter term as its title is correct in its exclusive claim to it. Apparently it is meant as an affirmation of monotheism, as a protest against tritheism. But the genuine Trinitarian is equally strong in his affirmation of the one, and his repudiation of the other. Therefore, if the word had not been appropriated by a particular

school of theology, if he could employ it in its actual significance apart from controversial associations, he, too, might call himself a Unitarian, he might say that he was both Trinitarian and Unitarian in his beliefs, that he held all that was essential to the positive Unitarian position with regard to God, while not assenting to its negations about Christ, and while adding other important ideas to his conception of the Godhead which an adherent of the theology to which the name "Unitarian" is now attached would not admit. Any Trinitarian doctrine which broke up the fundamental truth that God is One must be repudiated by a Christian believer. Jesus Christ commended the scribe who repeated the classic Old Testament declaration of the unity of God. He and His Apostles and all the New Testament teachers and writers stand clearly for this fundamental principle of Judaism. The grand truth which the prophets secured as the Israelites passed out of polytheism, through henotheism, to monotheism, is as much a Christian truth as it is a Jewish. Moreover, man's accumulated knowledge of the universe points in the same direction. The unity of the universe, knit together in

all its parts, points to the unity of the mind and will from which it comes.

A curious exception to this way of thinking may be found in Professor William James's recent book entitled "A Pluralistic Universe." But as far as that book makes for pluralism on the side of the other world, as well as with regard to our own world, it does not point to "gods many and lords many," but rather to secondary intelligences and powers, such as angels, saints, spirits of various grades, "the little people." In this respect it leaves the great thought of the Maker of heaven and earth and the Lord of all beyond the sweep of its speculations.

We will now take this fundamental idea of the unity of God for granted, while we go on to consider the grounds for believing in the threefoldness of His Being. As I have said, these are to be found first of all in historical facts. The Scripture statements which offer some approach to Trinitarianism are based on those facts; the later more elaborate and more definite credal assertions of the doctrine of the Trinity must go back to the same facts for their justification.

VII

In the first place, we have the revelation of God as our Father in heaven. This, we saw, is the essential revelation of God which we have received in the Person and life and teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. There was a simple-minded, devout group of men at Rome in the third century known as Monarchian. These worthy people were so anxious to magnify the idea of the Divinity of Christ and the worth of His saving death on the cross, that they refused to allow of any form of Trinitarian distinctions in the Being of God. Tertullian, in his rough, vigorous way, said that they "crucified the Father." Probably they did assert that God died on the cross. But no such statement as that is to be found in the New Testament. The utterance of it gives us a shock of surprise, and few, if any, thinking people would repeat it in the present day. It cannot be believed that God was dead during the interval between the dreadful hour when Jesus bowed His head on the cross and the wonderful moment when He came forth triumphant from the tomb—that on the Saturday before Easter there was no

living God in the universe. The idea is monstrous, impossible.

All the teaching of Christ about our Father in heaven, and all the preaching and writing of His Apostles on the subject, set before us the idea of God as the Supreme Being. When we think of Him as the Creator and Sustainer of all things, eternal, immortal, invisible, God above all, we have the thought of God the Father. He it is who spoke His word of power, and forthwith Creation sprang into being. His is the quickening and directing life that has brought about the gradual evolution of Nature. Every spring testifies to His continuous activity, when the earth wakes from her winter sleep to the flush and joy of life, fresh as Eden; every autumn bears witness to His bounty, in its golden harvest and the ruddy fruitfulness of the orchards. He clothes the fields with a beauty that Solomon in all his glory could not possess; not a poor, despised sparrow falls to the ground without His notice; the very hairs of our head are all numbered by Him. Bountiful and gracious, merciful and compassionate, the Almighty God who is before all and above all and beyond all, and yet also within all, in whom we

live and move and have our being, encourages us to draw near to Him as children to their father, so that the approach to God is the soul coming to its home. This is the conception of the Father that Jesus has given to us. But before Jesus appeared on earth, before the Father had sent His Son, the young lions roared in the desert and He gave them their meat, and like as a father pitieth his children so He pitied those who feared Him. Even then the poor man who dwelt in the secret place of the Most High was abiding under the shadow of the Almighty. The supremacy and the fatherliness of God were slowly discerned by mankind in the gradual development of revelation; but they were always in His nature. Christianity has not evolved the love of God; it has only revealed it. We must not let any consideration of other specific Christian doctrines blind us to this eternal truth, which is the greatest of all truths, and of which the love of Christ is the fruit and the image, never to be regarded as its alternative or substitute. This is the first element of the threefoldness of the Trinity—God above us as our Father.

VIII

The second essential truth in the threefoldness of the Trinity is the Divinity of Christ. We were considering that truth in an earlier chapter, and there is no need to go over the ground again. It stands before us as a historical fact. It is really also the historical basis of the doctrine of the Trinity. Apart from the Divinity of Christ there would be no such doctrine. Therefore it will be useless for those people who do not accept the Divinity of Christ to proceed any further with the present discussion. For them it has no basis. To their minds its originating cause does not exist. Fundamentally the reason why this doctrine exists at all is that people believing in the unity of God, and at the same time accepting the Divinity of Christ and His distinctness from the Father, have sought some means of reconciling these apparently inconsistent truths. If they are both true they cannot really be mutually contradictory. The logical instinct of our minds rises up in revolt against such an inconceivable position. Possibly our statements of the Trinitarian position are all wrong. But even in

that case some reconciliation, though perhaps inconceivable to us, must exist. But meanwhile the Trinitarian view holds the field; it is the only view which has ever satisfied the great body of believing Christians. The Unitarian always associates the two negations—disbelief in the Divinity of Christ, and disbelief in the Trinity. The Trinitarian always accepts both. He believes in the Divinity of Christ and he believes in the Trinity; and the second of these two articles of His creed rests on the first. He does not begin with an abstract Trinitarian creed, and then at a second stage in the construction of his theological system proceed to assign divine attributes to Jesus Christ so that our Lord may come to be regarded as the Second Person in his Trinity. That is the opposite to the order of his reasoning. It is true that some works of systematic theology are planned out the other way, giving the exposition of the Trinity first, in treating the idea of God, and only coming on to the doctrine of Christ later. But this is an arrangement resulting from later reflection; it is not the order of the historical development of doctrine.

IX

In the third place, we have the idea of the Holy Spirit, which came under our notice in the previous chapter. Now, it must be admitted that the intangibleness of this idea prevents us from thinking of the Third Person of the Trinity in the same way as of the Second. If there had been no problem of the Christ to originate the process of thought, the Church would not have begun a Trinitarian scheme in order to account for the phenomena of the Holy Spirit. But having been led by the facts of Christ to begin the process with the Second Person of the Trinity, it is easier for us to pass on to the idea of a Third, and so to find a theoretical explanation of this class of historical phenomena also.

These are the fundamental facts that seem to indicate the primary ideas of the doctrine of the Trinity. But over and above the facts themselves we have the teachings of Jesus Christ and His Apostles, which point in the same direction. Our Lord's references to God as our Father, to His own position of power and authority, and to the Holy Spirit, especially in connection with the peculiar heinousness of sin against the Holy Ghost,

seem to suggest a threefold Divinity. The baptismal formula in St. Matthew's Gospel, "baptizing them into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," is the nearest approach to a Trinitarian statement in the New Testament. It is especially noteworthy: (1) that "the Name" applies to all three, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; (2) that it is in the singular—"name," not "names"; (3) that the baptism, signifying a solemn dedication at a spiritual crisis, is equally to all three—to the Son and the Holy Spirit quite as explicitly as to the Father; (4) that Christ is called simply "the Son," His most clearly divine title; (5) that the name "God" is not used, and in particular that it is not applied simply to the Father, as in St. Paul's well-known doxology, and that therefore, since it must be implied in the whole sentence, by implication it is applied to all three. I have referred before to the fact that critical questions have been raised regarding the authenticity of this form of words. It would be useless to discuss those questions at all here, since we cannot go into them fully. But it may be mentioned, on the one hand, that the formula is very ancient, being found in the Church Manual

called "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," as well as in other early patristic writings, and that it has most excellent manuscript authority; but, on the other hand, that its style of language is later than other New Testament, and especially synoptic, phrases, and that the earliest references to baptism apart from this—namely, those in Acts—mention only the one name of Christ.

St. Paul has many passages in which he speaks of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit as in close association yet with a certain individual distinctness. The cases of the association of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are too numerous to need citation. They occur in the opening verses of nearly all the Epistles, and frequently in the course of them. The association of the Divine Three is much less common. Yet we have several definite instances of it.* The most conspicuous is the doxology in 2 Cor. xiii. 14. To be exact we may say that St. Paul writes sometimes of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit together, in close association and common action,

* 1 Thess. i. 1–5; Rom. v. 1, 5; viii. 11; 2 Cor. i. 21, 22; Gal. iv. 6; Eph. i. 3, 13; iii. 14, 16, 17; Phil. ii. 1, and iii. 3; Col. i. 3, 4, 8, etc.

several times of Christ and the Spirit, which is even called "the Spirit of Christ," less often of the Spirit in connection with God and apart from a reference to Christ. But in none of these cases is he giving any definite teaching on the mutual relations of the Persons of the Trinity. Other New Testament writers are less explicit on these points, but on the whole the tenor of all is the same.

X

It may well be said that we have not enough either in the known facts concerning God our Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, or in the express statements of Scripture on the subject, to justify us in forming a very exact definition of the Trinity. Perhaps we should be content with the facts and the statements without attempting any theory. The subject is too high for our comprehension, too vast, too deep. But at least we may state what we know of God in this way. The Christian revelation of God might be compared to the appearance of some great mountain, three peaks of which we discern standing up above the clouds and

the base of which we also see. We are sure that those dazzling peaks—so obviously distinct to our sight—as well as the known base, really form one mountain. But how that can be it is impossible for us to say. The clouds that obscure it so largely hide from us the secret of their union.

Against all this line of thought it is objected that the idea of the Trinity derogates from the conception of the supreme perfection of the infinite God because it suggests divisions and even gradations in His Being. We must beware, however, of materialistic associations. We are not called upon to think of God divided into three parts, as Britain consists of England, Scotland, and Wales. Spiritual distinctions are not spacial, nor need they be mutually exclusive. There may be distinctions without divisions.

But the very idea of distinctions in the Being of God is regarded as derogatory to His divine glory. This objection arises from the assumption that the Supreme must be a simple Monad. Why so? We find Nature infinitely various. If Nature comes from God, may we not regard her in some degree as His shadow and image in this

respect? An infinite variety in the universe would seem to point to an infinite variety in its Source. The atom which was once thought to be a bare unit is now known to be a whirling vortex of innumerable particles. Is it, therefore, the less wonderful and admirable? But while investigators are unravelling more and ever more of the complexity of Nature, are we to adhere to a fixed assumption that the God from whom all this comes has no complexity, no variety, no differences in His Being?

Moreover, in Nature the higher we ascend in the scale of existence the more various and complex do we find the organizations to be. The lowest forms are the simplest. Life at its poorest appears in a shapeless mass of jelly. In proportion as it appears in richer manifestations the organizations of the living creatures become more elaborate. It is most elaborate in man, whose life is the highest seen on earth. With this fact of Nature before us, is it not unreasonable to assert dogmatically, *à priori*, as a self-evident axiom, that there can be nothing in God corresponding to this elaboration of our natures, that when we reach the highest Being we suddenly lose all this wealth of

variety and come back to a uniformity more monotonous than that of the lowest of His creatures?

XI

But now the attack comes on us from the opposite direction. We are told that a threefoldness in the Being of God implies a limitation, and therefore must not be affirmed of the Infinite. I have pointed out before that arguments based on the idea of infinity invariably carry us out of our depth. It may be said that a Quaternity would be greater than a Trinity; that four persons would be superior to three, five to four, and so on up to infinity. Are we so sure of that when we are not concerned with physical or material multiplications or divisions? Were the seventy elders greater than the one man Moses? Are Virgil and Dante and Milton, being only three, inferior to the numerous staff of a modern newspaper? It is difficult to introduce such illustrations without irreverence. We simply do not know the meaning and possibilities of the divine threefoldness. And further, we do not know that there is only a threefoldness

in the Being of God. He has pleased to reveal Himself to us in this threefold way. This may be all that we need to know; it may be all that it is within the capacity of our very limited nature to perceive. What more there may be in the infinite wonder of His nature we cannot tell, we cannot dream. Awed and abashed before the mystery we can only confess our littleness and our ignorance. Surely it is the height of unreason for us to assume that there can be nothing in God beyond what we see in Him. Historical revelation has brought us as far as dimly perceiving a certain threefoldness, but for anything we know there may be a myriad-foldness, an infinite wealth of being entirely beyond our comprehension.

XII

I have yet to mention the greatest difficulty in the way of belief in the Trinity. It is that if there are three Persons in the Godhead, say what we may to the contrary, there must be three Gods. I will not quibble with this objection. I will frankly accept it—*if the word "person" is to be taken*

in the sense in which it is commonly understood to-day.

If by the word "person" we mean a self-conscious individual, as when we use this word in ordinary conversation concerning ourselves, and say "Peter, James, and John are three persons," surely the inference is self-evident. As Peter, James, and John, being three persons, must be three men, so the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—if they are three Persons in just the same way—must be three Gods. It is vain to use language which is simply self-contradictory. Of course we cannot say that God is Three in the same sense in which He is One. But that does not mean that the one cannot be three in a different sense.

Perhaps it would be well if we discarded the word "person" altogether when speaking of the Trinity. It is not a Biblical word. Christ and the Apostles did not speak of three Persons in one Godhead. That is no reason why we may not employ the word if it suits our purpose; but it is a reason for not shrinking from abandoning it if it leads to confusion of thought, and still more if it is a stumbling-block to faith.

This word is Latin in its origin. It has

no exact Greek equivalent. We find the original word *persona* used in two senses. It is employed for the characters of a drama. So we have the phrase *dramatis personæ*, and we speak of one man impersonating another. A second meaning of the word is highly technical. It is found in Roman law to designate one who has full legal rights. In this sense neither a slave, nor a minor, nor a woman was reckoned to be a person. The modern meaning of a separate, isolated individual was not in the word when it was first employed as a Trinitarian term. We need not go further into its antiquity. It is enough to take note of these facts in order to realize our freedom to change the phrases in which we describe what is revealed to us of God, and even the desirability of doing so.

This does not mean that we accept the Sabellian theory, according to which there are no essential distinctions in the Being of God, but only differences in the modes of His action towards us and in the aspects of His successive revelations of Himself. That view found favour with Schleiermacher and Horace Bushnell, and it is not altogether unpopular in our own day. But to my mind,

not only will it not agree with the very marked distinctions of the Scripture language, it does not correctly interpret the historical facts of Christianity. The distinctions of Father, Son, and Spirit are too real in the historical revelation as well as in the verbal statements of the Bible.

We must fall back on mystery. There are distinctions; but they are ineffable distinctions.

XIII

I may say in conclusion that the personality of Jesus Christ as we know Him in His earthly life introduces quite another factor into the problem, because that is seen after the Incarnation, when the divine is united to the human. There is no doubt, then, that we meet with a distinct personality in our modern sense of the term. Jesus is a real, individual person. He prays to His Father as to another Person, and obeys His Father as another Person. But we cannot therefore assume that there was the same kind of distinction between Father and Son before the Incarnation. It is to be observed that St. John chooses another term, "Logos,"

for that pre-existing period, and reserves the more personal title, "Son," for the incarnate period. For us it must be enough to fall back on the fact that God has really shown Himself to us in this threefold way, that this is a true revelation of His Being as far as we can see it, but that it is beyond our powers to penetrate the mystery and say how and to what extent this three-foldness exists in Him who is essentially and eternally one.

CHAPTER X

The Mystic, The Church, and The Creed

I

I CAN well suppose that not a few readers who have had the patience to accompany me thus far will have come to the conclusion that the foregoing discussions of the greatest of all problems have raised more questions than they have answered. In reply, I may say that they were not intended either for the unthinking, or for those whose theology is clear as crystal and rigid as cast-iron. There is no denying the fact that to-day, for a vast number of people, the mystery of God looms vaguer and darker than ever. There is no danger of unsettling them, because they are unsettled already. It is such readers that I have had in mind all along. As regards the other class, it may be a question whether unthinking assurance is not

symptomatic of a torpor that cannot be regarded as healthy.

II

In what was most speculative among the foregoing arguments, my aim has been to follow modestly in the way of Bishop Butler, and remove objections. We have repeatedly seen how certain apparently formidable objections have had to be faced with regard to the various phases of the conception of God that we have been contemplating. If they held good it would be hard to retain that conception in its fulness. Therefore we were led to the discussion of them. But the Christian idea of God in itself is not based on speculative grounds. That is just the point which I have tried to make clear throughout. Speculation about God always plunges us into darkness. Man cannot by searching find out God. The subject is too vast for mere mental apprehension. God has not pleased to reveal Himself to the logical intellect. When people complain that the more they think about God the more difficult it is for them to shape to themselves some notion of what He is, this is not at all surprising. It

entirely agrees with the Christian assumption.

Let us put the case at its worst. Suppose we say, "We 'feel after Him if haply we may find Him.' But in point of fact we do not find Him. We reach out wildly into the void, and our arms embrace vacancy. We cry to the silence, and the silence gives no answer back. We strain our eyes to penetrate the gloom, and no glimmer of light breaks on them. Empty and still and dark—such is the character of that world beyond as far as our unaided mind can discover. The mystery is insoluble, the secret inviolable." I do not grant this position. Socrates' *daimonion*, young Samuel's awakening voice, Isaiah's vision in the temple, the psalmist's reminiscence, "When Thou saidst, seek ye My face, my heart said, Thy face, Lord, will I seek," and many another soul experience in pre-Christian times, and even in pagan lands, go to prove that God did not shut Himself up in absolute seclusion and silence till He came forth in the Person of Christ. If the heavens declare the glory of God, if all Nature is vocal with His praises, it is not correct to say that He is entirely hidden behind curtains of darkness. Nature,

prophecy, history, human experience—all contain revelations of God.

Nevertheless, these revelations are so partial and confusing that they leave us perplexed and bewildered. Well, then, let us grant this. If you will, for the moment, let us go further and admit the agnostic conclusion with regard to a natural or speculative knowledge of God. Still, even that extreme position is no objection to the Christian view. On the contrary, this brings it out all the more clearly; it adds emphasis to St. John's assertion, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." That is just the main contention of the present discussion. We started with the position that our one clear, sure conception of God is that at which we arrive from a contemplation of Christ. We can see God in Christ with a clearness that is attainable nowhere else. It is not necessary to deny all other knowledge of God. We need not follow Marcion and Ritschl in unduly depreciating both the natural and the Old Testament revelations. But we have to see that by themselves they are imperfect and unsatisfactory. The more imperfect and the more unsatisfactory they

are felt to be, the more urgently are we driven to the Christian method.

While this is the main position that I have endeavoured to hold throughout, there are certain accompanying considerations to which I desire to draw attention in bringing these chapters to a close. They are not qualifications of the central idea of God as revealed in Christ, but they must be taken both as expanding it and as bringing it out in distinct thought and applying it to experience.

III

In the first place, we must observe that God's revelation of Himself in Christ is not to be wholly grasped by a study of our Lord's Person and character. Certainly it is much more than what we can gather from an examination of the sayings of Jesus recorded in the Gospels. If we took those sayings by themselves, apart from their function of making the Speaker of them known to us, they would belong to the category of prophetic utterances. If we felt that Jesus was infinitely greater than the greatest of the prophets, still His

sayings, considered merely as sayings, would be of the same order and nature as the sayings of the prophets. As far as we could derive definite ideas from them by any legitimate process of exegesis we should be discovering the revelation they contained. This would be a literary process. The revelation would be a verbal revelation. We should say, "Jesus tells us this and that about God. We believe that Jesus knows God. Therefore we take these statements as containing so much information thus dogmatically conveyed to us by the highest authority."

IV

But we mean much more than this when we speak of the revelation of God in Christ. It is, as St. Paul says, "truth *in* Jesus." Even His words are most valuable to us not for the sake of what they immediately tell us in so many explicit sentences, but for their revelation of their Speaker's mind and heart. They make Christ known to us. Then we contemplate Him, and in the contemplation of Christ we come to our vision of God.

Having begun this process we must go much further. Although our Lord struck His contemporaries as an incomparable preacher, so that some of them exclaimed "Never man spake like this man," He was much more than the Prince of preachers, much more than the supremely great Prophet. He did not only reveal His nature and character by His utterances; He made them more evident by His life and deeds. Therefore if we are to see God in Christ, this will be by contemplating His whole life-course. But that life-course was crowned and consummated by His death and resurrection. Therefore these climateric events must be especially taken into account if we would see the light that shines out to us from Christ, and in its shining reveals God.

Can we stop here? Does the story of Jesus end at the resurrection and the few scenes of His risen life recorded in the Gospels? St. Luke designated his Gospel as a narrative of the things that Jesus *began* to do and to teach. This he wrote in the opening sentence of his second volume, in which he was about to give the story of the Early Church and its missions. Therefore

he must have meant that story to be an exhibition of the way in which Jesus *continued* to act and teach. Accordingly in the first miracle that he there describes he is careful to report how St. Peter said to Æneas, the paralytic of Lydda, "Jesus Christ maketh thee whole." It would seem to be in accordance with St. Luke's idea to call his book "The Acts of Christ" rather than to designate it "The Acts of the Apostles."

But if this is at all correct we cannot stop at the last page of St. Luke's second volume. If it be the case that Christ was working in His Church during the Apostolic age, we have good reason to believe that He has continued to work in His Church throughout subsequent ages. We have no ground for saying that this activity ceased about the year A.D. 60. Therefore we must extend our view of the scope of the revelation of God in Christ right down the ages of Christendom. Everything that has been done in the Spirit of Christ, not only within His Church but in the world for which He lived and died, all the home fruits of the gospel, all the foreign missionary victories, all the growth of Christian ethics, Christian philanthropy, Christian life and service, such

as the emancipation of slaves, the cultivation of the ideal of purity, the elevation of woman, the care of the poor, the relief of the suffering, the maintenance of truth and charity as directly Christian graces, all spring from the presence and power of the redeeming Christ, manifest His Spirit, and in thus manifesting it, continue His revelation of God to mankind.

V

Next, it is to be observed that this revelation of God in Christ can only be appreciated by those who have a kindred spirit in sympathy with it. It is not a matter-of-fact objective manifestation. Caiaphas did not see in Christ what John saw. When our Lord stood before the Jewish Council there was no aureole about His head to distinguish Him from other men. The people who cried "Crucify Him" preferred Barabbas. You can never understand anybody unless you sympathize with him. The disdainful biographer cannot be a discerning biographer. If this is true between man and man, how much more must it apply to our appreciation of the Divine Man! There is far-reaching

significance in St. Paul's words : " For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man that is in him ? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." The Apostle's conclusion from this position is not agnosticism—that God is unknowable. It occurs in the heart of a profound discussion on spiritual discernment, which he ascribes to the indwelling of God's Spirit in us, with the result that we can know divine things.

This may be illustrated from other regions of knowledge. A person who is not gifted with a musical ear cannot understand music, and one who has no eye for colour or grace of form is incapable of appreciating art. Musical matters must be musically discerned; artistic truths must be artistically discerned ; so spiritual truths must be spiritually discerned. Therefore, the most searching study of the historical revelation of God in Christ will not bring us any true knowledge of God unless we carry with it that spiritual appreciativeness which is the real key to the mystery. Conversely the simple and childlike, who have the true spirit, may discern what is quite inaccessible to unsympathetic scholarship and criticism. Thus we see the

truth to which our Lord gave expression when He exclaimed, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and has revealed them unto babes." Here we are carried a step further than the advance from pure speculation to the revelation of God in Christ. We saw that the failure of the speculative method of discovering God, drove us to the historical method of seeing Him in Christ. But now we have to acknowledge that this will be equally barren and futile if we have not the kindred spirit by means of which alone we can understand Christ and discover the revelation of God in Him.

VI

At this point we need to be on our guard against a fatal error, the error of identifying orthodoxy with spirituality. That is the virus of Pharisaism. The doleful tragedy of Church history, a long-drawn-out agony of many ages, is mainly due to its baneful influence. Dante saw it and exposed it; yet it worked its worst mischief after his day

in the diabolical cruelties of the Inquisition. It is based on an assumption, the conceited assumption of the bigot, that he is certainly right while those who differ from him are assuredly wrong. But that is not all. Its graver fault is that it mistakes intellectual correctness of creed for true spiritual knowledge. An unmusical person may pass an examination in the theory of music, and one who has no eye for beauty may be trained in the principles of art criticism. Similarly an utterly unspiritual man may be dogmatically taught a correct creed and may honestly believe its verbal propositions. On the other hand, saints have erred. Mr. Bradlaugh regarded himself as an atheist, yet his noble toil for the rights of the poor lifted him high above such deans and bishops as Anthony Trollope might have found for his models, orthodox as they were. A Trinitarian may believe Unitarianism to be erroneous without doubting the singular beauty of the character of Channing or the profound sincerity of Martineau's "Endeavours after the Christian Life." We must distinguish clearly between an apprehension of verbal statements which reaches no further than the intellectual form of the

ideas they convey, and that deeper knowledge which grasps a truth in its reality, appreciates its value, feels the force of it, enters vitally into the heart of it. Such a knowledge of God is the really valuable knowledge, and it is only possible to the spiritually minded, but it may be enjoyed by them along with much intellectual error.

Considerations of this character introduce us again to the threshold of mysticism to which I had occasion to refer earlier.* It is a fascinating theme into which I have not scope for entering at all fully. A perplexing fact, which emerges again and again in the history of the mystics, is that they are so much the same, not only in all ages but also in all religions. The Christian mystic Jacob Boehme appears to be nearer to Plotinus the Neoplatonist than he is to Bellarmine the Roman Catholic theologian or Calvin the Protestant. There is more seeming affinity between some of the mystics of the Church and Jewish Kaballists and Mohammedan Sufis and Indian Brahmins than between them and their contemporary scholastic theologians. Mysticism represents a method, a temperament, a spirit; it may be

* Pages 40 ff.

found in almost any religion; and wherever it is found it manifests similar characteristics. Generally we may observe that the Christian mystic is more absorbed with his contemplation of God than with thoughts about Christ, or if the Christly element is developed in his consciousness, that this is with reference to the unseen heavenly Christ rather than to the Jesus of the Gospels. The mystic cares little for a historical revelation, for concrete facts and definite events such as the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem or His death at Calvary.

Accordingly, those who make much of the historical revelation in the Person of Christ commonly develop antagonism to the mystics. The most conspicuous instance of this position is the case of Ritschl, who was strongly opposed to mysticism, mainly on account of its subjectivity and its individualism. The same line is followed by Professor Harnack in the present day.

VII

Nevertheless, we are now witnessing an interesting drawing together of these two once mutually antagonistic methods. They

are both opposed to the speculative, rationalistic method. Because Hegel is obscure we must not imagine that he is mystical. He claims to base his philosophy on logic. But your mystic has a singular horror of logic. He regards the syllogism as barren, because purely formal. He does not believe that truth is to be got by any manipulation of his own thinking. Supremely subjective as he is in one way, if you grant his assumption his knowledge is most wonderfully objective. When he turns his mind inwards it is not to study its own inner workings; it is not to contemplate his interior self; it is to behold the vision of God, to see God. It is true that he may deny a difference between himself and God, may assert that in his deepest experience he is one with God. Still, even then it is God whom he contemplates. He loses himself in God. Self disappears. All is God.

It is not, however, merely in their common antagonism to rationalism that mysticism and its old enemy Ritschlianism are making mutual overtures of friendship. Each is beginning to allow of some truth in the other. The Neo-Ritschlian is not so absolute as Ritschl himself had been in confining our intercourse

with God to the impression produced on us by the historic Jesus of the Gospels. Professor Hermann makes allowance for direct communion with God, although it is to be brought about by means of that historical gospel impression. On the other hand, Christian mysticism cannot dispense with Christ. If it did dispense with Christ it would cease to be Christian. We are seeing to-day both a keenly awakened interest in the Person and life of Christ, and also a widespread, though vague and not too well informed, interest in mysticism. Many people are seeking to combine these two interests which to Ritschl seemed to be as antagonistic as fire and water.

VIII

The approach, as I have said, is mutual.

First, it is becoming apparent that the Christian mystic must derive his knowledge of God primarily from Christ. As disciples of the inner life, members of the Society of Friends are confessedly mystics. Yet the more modern Quakers are keenly alive to the problems of the gospels and fully participate in the awakened interest in the

study of our Lord's life, which is so remarkable just now not merely on literary and historical grounds, but much more because it has been found to be vital to religious faith and life. The mystic thinks he sees truth of God by the inner light. But when he goes beyond vague feeling, and contemplates this truth in the form of ideas, he may discover that those ideas were not newborn in the act of contemplation; that they have not sprung into being out of silence and darkness and the unthinking void of apathy. Even if they have come to a soul waiting in stillness and inaction, they have a genesis that is susceptible of being traced further back. If they are in harmony with the thought of Christ this is not an accidental coincidence. The Christian in whose inner consciousness they appear has been a reader of the New Testament, a hearer of gospel teaching; he has lived all his life in a congenial atmosphere. It is in Christendom that specifically a Christian conception of God dawns on the mind of the Christian mystic. The simple explanation of the phenomenon on its intellectual side is that a knowledge of Christ which has sunk down into the subconscious ego has re-emerged

in the plane of consciousness in process of spiritual meditation.

Over and above this there is another influence of Christ to be detected in genuine Christian mysticism. Tauler and all of the better order of mystics have taught that knowledge comes through love and that love realizes itself in obedience. Therefore the true Christian mystic is very different from an Indian jogi. He is no idle dreamer. He knows the doctrine by doing the commandment. What commandment? The commandment of Jesus. In other words, by going Christ's way he sees Christ's truth.

Now, it may be said, this view, if it is correct, will destroy mysticism. It is a rationalistic explanation of mysticism, and the mysticism which is rationalistically explained ceases to be mysticism at all. That would be the older Ritschlian contention. Ritschl believed that he was demolishing mysticism as an idle chimera. But the combination of the two elements which many are now advocating has no such result. It recognizes a mystical element in the Christian knowledge of God. This may be detected in two stages. First, we cannot appreciate Christ except in so far as we have the Spirit of Christ. This

sympathetic affinity is of the essence of mystical insight. Secondly, our knowledge of God derived from the historic Christ even when thus spiritually and sympathetically received is not all we can enjoy. Christ is "the Door," "the Way." We come to Christ, but we do not end at Christ. We go through Him to the Father. Then we have communion with God. It is still true that our ideas of God will be those which have reached us from Christ and which sprang originally from the revelation of God in the historic Jesus of the Gospels. Not any the less, however, do we hold them as present truths and contemplate them in themselves. When a soul is alive to perceive their existence and feel their force it is brought into direct and immediate contact with God. These ideas burn like stars in that soul's heaven and light up its darkness with their own radiance. God Himself is felt to be near, and what was learnt of Him from Christ is seen in Him by experience. This, I believe, is the solid truth at the basis of mysticism, and it is a truth which admits of large and rich development. Perhaps what more may be found in it only the mystics themselves can understand.

So far our conception of God has been regarded from the individualistic standpoint. One of Ritschl's strongest objections to mysticism is its individualism, its failure to recognize the importance of the kingdom of God as a social community and the Church as this kingdom in relation to worship. In fairness to the mystics we should allow that the leading place the best of them give in their thought and life to love implies a social religion. The solitary has no opportunity for the exercise of this primary grace. Nevertheless, while the mystic gains keenness for his inward vision by the exercise of love, the very fact that it is inward cuts it off from any common association. Ultimately each mystic must see the light and hear the voice for himself in the abysmal depths of his own consciousness.

IX

Therefore we shall have to go beyond mysticism to some other type of Christian experience if we are to allow adequate room for a social element in the knowledge of God. It is here that the idea of the Church comes

into contact with our conception of God. It is in the Church that the social character of Christianity is best realized. The Church is the brotherhood of Christians, the common family of those who realize their status as children of God. This is the case whether we regard it in its totality as the Church Catholic, consisting of all the true followers of Christ, in various sections and with various forms of worship and methods of discipline, scattered over the whole world, or in the particular sense as one local community of Christians. Taking the idea in the larger application of it, St. Paul regards the Church as a temple of the Holy Spirit, as specifically inhabited by the Divine Spirit. There is ground for believing that the consciousness of God's presence will be realized in this community as it is not to be expected in solitude. Jesus definitely promised His presence where even two or three should be gathered together in His name.

We may understand why this should be the case for two reasons. In the first place, since the fundamental, central truth in the Christian conception of God is His love—the vital, elementary, all-inclusive truth with

which we started being that God is love—we may expect this to be best perceived and most valued by those who are cultivating the spirit of love among themselves. Only love can appreciate love. The selfish, self-contained soul cannot know the secret of the Being who is supremely unselfish and beneficent. Just in proportion as we cultivate brotherhood one with another may we expect to see and know the Fatherhood of God.

But there is a second reason why the realization of the Church idea should help us in our approach to the mystery of God. The Church is an organic whole. In saying this I do not refer to any external organism such as we find most elaborately developed in hierarchial forms of ecclesiasticism. I mean the spiritual organism in which all the parts minister one to another spiritually. Here we overleap the barriers of sect and denomination. An illustration of it is seen in our hymn-books, the contents of which are drawn from all varieties of Christian communities, yet which have become the *media* of our deepest devotion. There is not a Church which would not be spiritually impoverished if it confined itself to the hymns produced by its own members.

Similarly in our literature we draw upon all Christendom. The Anglican would be the poorer if he were forbidden to look at "The Pilgrim's Progress," and the Baptist would suffer a deprivation if he were not permitted to look at Frederic William Robertson's "Sermons."

Now, this wealth of a common Christian life and thought in the Church, a reservoir to which many streams contribute, is at our disposal when we would refresh our souls with the fulness of God's revealed truth. There is, of course, a piquancy in our private experience that no second-hand knowledge can match. But that experience itself may be deepened and quickened by intercommunication with the experiences of other souls. When among those souls are the giants of faith, the Church's saints and seers, whose vision is as the eagle's piercing gaze, compared with our dim sight, it is an immense advantage to draw on their richer perceptions to aid our duller vision. In art the masterpieces and in literature the classics have been perceived by generations of experts and thus gradually fixed in places of undoubted supremacy, which it would be impertinent for the ignorant tyro to doubt.

May it not be the same with the best things in the spiritual world? Here the true experts are not the scholars and the critics, nor are they the ecclesiastics and official authorities of the Church. They are the saints and seers. Some of them are unlearned men such as Francis of Assisi and George Fox, but all of them are rich in Christian experience. These men are the eyes of the Church, and for the full appreciation of the vision of God that is offered to us all in Christ we should do well to learn from them. Thus it will come about that the complete Christian conception of God will be that conception which sprang out of His revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ, but which is most fully apprehended in His Church.

X

This brings us to another question. How are we to view the creeds of Christendom in relation to this completed revelation of God in Christ through His Church? The creeds profess to be the Church's final expression of its corporate perception of the truth of God. To brush them aside contemptuously

as antiquated formulæ of effete metaphysics is to show an impatient arrogance for which we have no warrant in any proved superiority of our own knowledge and thinking.

The three creeds commonly recited in Western Christendom are very different in character. The "Apostles' Creed" contains little more than an epitome of New Testament facts and statements. The so-called "Athanasian Creed" is a Latin hymn, not a creed of the Church universal. The "Nicene Creed" is the one creed that has been set up by both the Eastern and the Western Churches as their standard of orthodoxy. It is worthy of respect for the extreme care with which it was constructed by the ablest minds in the age of keenest theological thought. Better than that, its authors and early champions were men of devout faith and deep spiritual life. Athanasius, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa —these men are lights of the Church in all ages. Moreover, while they use the language of Greek metaphysics their appeal is to Scripture and experience. We may discard their methods of exegesis as unscientific; we may fail to follow their logic; their analogies may strike us as more quaint than

apt. If we are not the slaves of an ecclesiastical system we may attach little weight to the votes of their councils. Rejoicing in the glorious freedom of the sons of God, we may refuse to accept any verbal formulæ from the hands of ecclesiastical authority. We may even think some of the dogmas unintelligible and self-contradictory. Nevertheless, when all this is allowed, it seems to me difficult to resist the conclusion that in its own way—which may not be the only way or even the best way—according to the forms of thought shaped by its current metaphysics, and in the language of its age, this great Nicene Creed did express fundamental truths of the Christian conception of God. Some of us may think it too ambitious in the exactness of its definitions. Still, it brings before us the Fatherhood of God, the combined Divinity and humanity of Christ, and the living power of the Holy Spirit. I am not sure that there is much advantage in our making public use of this most venerable document of all Church literature. It is so metaphysical, so antique, and at the same time so crisp and clear and positive, where some of us must confess to great wonderment and a sense of profound mystery. But I

am convinced that most of the theologies that deny its central ideas are further from the truth of God revealed to us in Christ.

In bringing this difficult study to a close, I wish to re-emphasize its main contention. The Christian conception of God is that idea of His nature and character which we derive from Christ. Therefore it depends on our valuation of Christ. In this way it becomes to us an idea of faith. It cannot be evolved by abstract speculation. It is not to be arrived at by a contemplation of the physical universe and an induction of facts of Nature. Whatever we may learn of the Divine by means of ontological or cosmological methods—and some may think much and some little—our peculiarly Christian knowledge of God as our Father, whose highest attribute is perfect love, comes to us from what we see in Christ, and depends for its fulness and its assurance on the extent to which He has won our soul's confidence and captured our heart's devotion.

THE END

PRINTED BY
WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON AND BECCLES.

BOOKS OF THE INNER LIFE

Edited by

R. F. HORTON, M.A., D.D.

A Series of Uniform Volumes written or prepared by some of the leading Free Churchmen and forming a complete Library of Devotion.

Size of Volume, small crown 8vo, 7¼ by 4¾. Handsome red cloth, full gilt back and side. Price 2s. 6d. net.

I. **The Holy Spirit.**
By W. L. WALKER.

II. **Private Prayers and Devotions.**
By J. E. ROBERTS, M.A., B.D.

III. **Aaron's Breastplate and other Addresses.**
By J. RENDEL HARRIS, M.A., D.Litt.

IV. **Themes for Hours of Meditation.**
By W. L. WATKINSON, D.D.

V. **Galilean Philosophy.**
By GEORGE WADE ROBINSON.

In Preparation.

Habits of Holiness.
By F. B. MEYER, B.A.

Volume to be announced.
By R. F. HORTON, M.A., D.D.

Songs of the Soul.
By T. H. DARLOW, M.A.

Other volumes to be announced.

National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches,
London; Thomas Law, Memorial Hall, E.C.

LITTLE BOOKS ON THE DEVOUT LIFE.

Edited by

Rev. F. B. MEYER, B.A.

A Series of Uniform Volumes forming a complete Library of Devotion. Price 1s. 6*d. each.*

I. **The Possibilities of Obscure Lives.**
By ALFRED ROWLAND, B.A., LL.B., D.D.

II. **Lessons from the Cross.**
By CHARLES BROWN.

III. **The Life of the Christian.**
By G. CAMPBELL MORGAN, D.D.

IV. **As a King, ready to Battle.**
By W. J. TOWNSEND, D.D.

V. **The Soul's Wrestle with Doubt.**
By F. B. MEYER, B.A.

VI. **The Whole Armour of God.**
By G. S. BARRETT, D.D.

VII. **The Devotional Use of the Holy Scriptures.**
By J. MONRO GIBSON, M.A., D.D.

VIII. **The Guiding Hand of God.**
By J. RENDEL HARRIS, M.A., Litt.D.

IX. **The Open Secret.**
By R. F. HORTON, M.A., D.D.
Special Volume, 2s. 6*d. net. Cheap Edition,* 1s. *net.*

X. **From Natural to Spiritual.**
By J. B. MEHARRY, D.D.

XI. **A Chain of Graces.**
By GEORGE HANSON, M.A., D.D.

National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches,
London : Thomas Law, Memorial Hall, E.C.